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ABSTRACT

How can schoolyard bullies be stopped? How can sensitive children become more resilient? How can teachers and parents help youngsters deal with teasing and taunting? This guide--for teachers and parents of children in grades K-12--helps to answers these questions and others like them. It uses the "frames-and-scripts" approach, a method based on social-learning theory, to provide techniques for preventing and countering low-level aggression at school and at home. "Frames" are mental pictures teachers and parents can use when helping children understand the complexities of teasing and being teased. "Scripts" are words and phrases that teachers and parents can use in developing understandable explanations of teasing and taunting. Chapter 1 introduces the frames-and-scripts model and defines important terms associated with teasing and taunting. Chapter 2 examines the relationship between teasing and bullying, the lifelong consequences of bullying, and the importance of prevention. Chapter 3 addresses the issues of language and social growth, and the importance of age-appropriate interventions. Chapter 4 establishes a guiding philosophy that serves as the basis for the techniques used later in the guide. Chapter 5 offers ways to apply the frames-and-scripts model to deal with bullying. Chapters 6 and 7 further develop the concepts and applicability of frames and scripts. Chapter 8 reviews the importance of adult responses to adolescent teasing and harassment in the overall prevention of violence in schools. Five appendices contain checklists, worksheets, and resources, including videos and websites. (Contains 57 primary resources.) (WFA)

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Teasing and Harassment

The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents

John H. Hoover
Glenn W. Olsen

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National Educational Service

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Acknowledgments

From John

I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE FOUR MALE ROLE MODELS who all teach similar things about how men behave ethically and who all offer something unique in the mix that makes up an individual. To Ray Hoover, my father, and to Drs. Floyd Ayers, Kristen Juul, and Tim Messenger, mentors extraordinaire.

From Glenn

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Introduction

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but
words will never hurt me.

—American Folk Aphorism

As Sara, a sixth grader, approached her classroom after lunch, she knew she was in trouble. Three of the bigger boys who had made fun of her on the bus that morning were blocking the doorway, and Ms. Johnson wasn't back from lunch yet. Just as Sara thought she would have to turn around, the boys parted and let her in. Surrounding her, they mooed and snorted, like pigs. Jim, the biggest of the three, whispered in her ear, "Can I milk you, you cow?"

Sally, Harriet, and Joan exploded in gales of laughter. Staying overnight at Harriet's house, the three fifth graders had been sharing confidences about boys they liked. Sally, annoyed when Joan expressed interest in Roger, a boy in their class, cried, "Joan, you stupid cow!" All three girls exploded into laughter once more.

"You can't talk—you can't talk—you can't talk—right," 3-year-old Albert chanted mockingly in the face of Sam, another toddler at the childcare center. While not understanding the literal meaning of the words, Sam fully comprehended the mocking tone. Sniffling back the beginnings of tears, Sam bunched his fist and bashed Albert's nose as if pounding a nail with a hammer.

Following a rousing discussion in history class of the causes of the Civil War, Cyril and Arnold continued the discussion on the way to their junior English class. Coming around a corner, they ran into several members of the hockey team. "Hey faggots," said burly John, smiling. "Haven't you got anything better to do than read about the Civil War? We wanted to invite you to come out for hockey this year, right boys?" When Arnold and Cyril talked about it later, Cyril thought they had been subtly warned by John not to talk so much during history class. Arnold thought that what they had experienced had been merely good-natured ribbing. "Those guys are harmless," he said.

ARE THOSE GUYS HARMLESS, AS ARNOLD ASSERTS? Young people with whom we have talked often express confusion about ribbing and teasing. They bring us their questions:

- How do I know if I am being teased, ridiculed, or threatened?
- How can I tell whether something I say in fun is taken badly?
- How can I get kids to stop making fun of my weight?

The relationship between teasing, bullying, and more intense forms of violence deserves our careful attention. The effects of unchecked verbal aggression are a very real concern for parents and educators. Nine-year-old Amy Hagadorn, taunted about her appearance and gait, wrote to Santa asking for "just one day without teasing." It is hard to conceive of the taunting Amy endured because of her cerebral palsy as anything other than violence. Teasing can be far from innocuous. In the last days of August 1999, a young man in a small Illinois town committed suicide over what his parents described as the longstanding, brutal teasing he experienced at school. A similar suicide had been reported in Georgia some years earlier (Head, 1996).

Schoolyard bullies are much more likely than other students to engage in risky behaviors and to perform violent acts as they grow older. Bullies, for example, are much more likely than are non-bullies to associate with antisocial peers, smoke tobacco, and drink alcohol—as early as the fifth grade, in some cases (Berthold & Hoover, 2000). Without intervention, bullies' lives may slip into a downward spiral.

How can bullies be stopped? How can children be taught to be more understanding of one another? How can teachers and parents help youngsters deal with teasing and taunting? How can thin-skinned children become more resilient? This book should help you answer these questions and more. We hope that the procedures outlined here can help parents and teachers understand the dynamics of teasing and effectively handle teasing episodes.

Organization of the Book

This book covers many aspects of teasing and harassment. It will take you from the general to the specific, the conceptual to the concrete. You need not approach the content sequentially. In fact, you may find it helpful to go directly to a more focused chapter, such as chapter 6 ("Frames") or chapter 7 ("Scripts"), to learn about techniques, then flip back to earlier chapters (1 through 4) to read about the rationale behind our recommendations.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the book with a discussion of the importance of language in our society and in our global community. The *frames and scripts* approach is introduced and described, and terms associated with teasing—taunting, bullying, and sexual harassment—are presented and defined.

Chapter 2 deals with the relationship between teasing and bullying. The importance of prevention is emphasized. Possible lifelong consequences of bullying, based on the best available research, are discussed.

Chapter 3 addresses issues of language and social growth and the importance of age-appropriate interventions. Suggestions are offered to help adults tailor their approach and language to match the developmental age of the youngsters involved in various teasing situations.

In **chapter 4,** basic assumptions underpinning the approach taken in this book are laid out. A guiding philosophy is explained, which serves as the basis for the specific techniques more fully covered in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 consists of a brief explanation of the *frames and scripts model* for dealing with bullying.

In **chapter 6** the idea of *frames* is introduced. This concept should help concerned adults analyze teasing exchanges and explain them sensibly and appropriately to children.

In **chapter 7,** the notion of *scripts*—vocabulary, phrases, and guided conversations for dealing with teasing—is fully developed.

Chapter 8 offers a brief discussion of the importance of understanding teasing and harassment, and adult response to such behavior, in the overall prevention of violence in schools and communities.

Appendices A and B contain helpful checklists. Further tools can be found in the form of worksheets in Appendices C, D, and E. Appendix F provides additional resources that concerned adults may find useful, including a list of relevant web sites.

Chapter 1

Not Just Words

CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES ARE DEVOTED to convincing young people that language is beautiful and powerful. We ask them to express themselves carefully and spell correctly. We praise the grace and charm of Shakespeare's sonnets and his beautifully drawn insights into the human condition. We urge young adults to appreciate visions of life and its struggles as portrayed in well-conceived novels.

In speech classes, we teach young people the rules and forms that constitute excellence in verbal communication. English teachers offer practice in persuasive speech, and they teach about the effective use of quips and humorous anecdotes. High-school debaters are taught to hone their arguments by sharpening their wording and wits.

Language is the sea in which the educated person swims. A sign that children are passing into adulthood is their mastery of sophisticated linguistic forms—modes of address, terms representing sexual knowledge, and the technical vocabulary needed to talk with adults about abstract issues. Given modern technology, a community's makeup can be more linguistic than geographic.

The worldwide "village" of English speakers, for example, is hundreds of millions strong.

Influential Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934/1996) argued that language underpins thinking itself—at least thinking about the types of abstractions (love, success, freedom, etc.) that are divorced from the world of real objects and are thus dependent upon words for their very existence. Language may determine the limits and form of what a person is able to think about. If it doesn't define the limits of thought entirely, language probably places boundaries on one's imagination.

Language is important in the creation of community. It lies at the center of thinking and is the medium in which many of our deepest thoughts and most profound feelings are expressed. Nonetheless, when children first feel the power of language to wound, we often tell them that "words will never hurt you."

We cannot have it both ways: either language is powerful or it is not. If it is potent, its potential is for good or ill. Certainly the way the message "dog-face" is received depends on many factors, including the attitudes of both the teaser and what we will call the *teasee*. Nonetheless, the child wielding potentially damaging "word weapons" retains a critical responsibility for others' well-being. We believe that this potential for harm has not been addressed sufficiently in child-rearing materials.

To the extent that young people view words as signaling certain events, their view of language is magical. If words have frequently been paired with feelings of fear or humiliation, youngsters will receive teasing as if words were blows. It does no good, and probably some harm, to suggest to them that the

expressions are only words. To them, the words themselves can be significantly damaging.

We are often asked, "What do I do when my child is bullied or teased?" We hope that this book, which is based on our best current understanding of child development, bullying, aggression, and teasing, can provide an answer.

The Frames and Scripts Model

We advocate an approach we call the *frames and scripts model.* Based on social learning theory, this approach offers easy-to-learn language for dealing with teasing across the range of children's ages and levels of cognitive ability.

Social learning theory makes several assumptions. The first is that violence and its underpinnings (such as teasing and taunting) are learned. This means that they can be unlearned. A second assumption is that much of what goes on in the internal world of the child is related to language. In essence, children (and adults) talk to themselves about what is going on in any situation that requires problem solving (a process called self-talk). We also assume that if thoughts about relationships are based on self-talk, then inappropriate internal messages, messages that worsen disputes, must be similarly based, and therefore must be subject to modification. In other words, children can learn to talk to themselves more effectively. Finally, we assume that problem-solving sequences can be taught.

In the model we recommend, *frames* offer children a way to visualize their interactions with others, while *scripts* offer them the vocabulary—the *internal language* they may lack—for dealing with teasing situations.

Frames. *Frames* are mental pictures to use when helping children understand the complexities of teasing and being teased. We ask children to imagine themselves in relation to others as if enclosed in a frame or mirror. When one child decides to tease another, he or she is asked to think about whether the other child is "in the frame." If the teasee is *in the frame*, good-natured ribbing will probably be all right. If the child being teased is *out of the frame*, teasing may be hurtful. For a more detailed explanation of *frames*, see chapter 6.

Scripts. *Scripts* are phrases and vocabulary that teachers and parents can use in developing understandable explanations of ribbing and taunting (see Table 1.1 for key terms used in the *scripts* approach and throughout this book). Psychologists describe the process whereby "problem-solving words" uttered by adults actually become thought patterns experienced by children. In the sense that children are better able to talk to themselves about teasing, they have, in our use of the term, *internalized* adult problem-solving scripts so that the words become part of their own self-talk (See Meichenbaum, 1977 for a classical explanation of this phenomenon; also see Vygotsky, 1934/1996). Younger children may need to be taught such words as *sad*, *unhappy*, and *angry*, and such concepts as *making fun of*, *making friends*, and *talking nicely*. Older children may need to be taught such terms as *intimacy*, *irony*, and *sarcasm*, and such concepts as *sexual harassment*, *playing with words*, and *empathy*. For a more detailed explanation of *scripts*, see chapter 7.

Humor, Sex, and Teasing

Teachers have told us that much of the teasing and taunting that takes place among even very young children is sexual in

Table 1.1

Key Terms

- **Teasing:** bantering or joking with an element of insult that is usually softened by humor.
- **Taunting:** a more intense form of teasing without the softening use of humor.
- **Sexual Harassment:** teasing of a sexual nature that causes discomfort and can create for its victim what is known as a *hostile environment.*
- **Bullying:** the intentional injuring—physical, psychological, or both—of one person by another.

Note: All of these terms are in some sense interchangeable and are very much open to interpretation. A teaser may perceive a comment as amusing, while a teasee may perceive the same comment as harassment or bullying.

nature. Often, children are unaware of the negative meaning of the words they are using. However, it is important for parents and educators to address teasing—particularly when its content is sexual. No real line can be drawn between innocent teasing and sexual harassment because the existence of a hostile environment (part of the definition of sexual harassment) ultimately depends on the way messages are received by the persons being teased. For this reason, sexual harassment is discussed along with teasing in this book. Adults should deal carefully with any and all situations where teasing contains overt or implied sexual content or putdowns. It is also vitally important to remember that leading experts in the area of sexual harassment trace its origins back to teasing and bullying during the elementary years (Stein, 1995).

Remember to Be SAFE

Adults may find it helpful to remember the acronym SAFE when dealing with teasing and bullying.

- **Stop it:** Harassment must be gently halted by the firm but loving intervention of an adult.
- **Administer emotional first aid:** Victims, and sometimes bullies, require comforting before they can proceed to problem solving.
- **Frame it:** Adults must verbalize their thoughts by using and teaching scripts as they help children solve problems.
- **Educate:** Adults must teach the appropriate strategies or scripts and encourage children to practice these skills in real-world settings.

Chapter Summary

- Words have demonstrable power, and for some children they may even be nearly magical.
- Teasing is an example of the power of words. Teasing can bring people together by breaking barriers or, under certain circumstances, it can produce very real hurt.
- Teasing can be part of a pattern of violence. Teasing at the elementary level has, in fact, been identified as the origin of sexual harassment.
- Teasing, taunting, and sexual harassment can be approached through systematic application of adult-child verbal interactions (social learning).
- We can teach children, through words (or *scripts*), how to deal with the power of words.

Chapter 2

Bullying and Teasing

WE ARE LINKING BULLYING WITH TEASING because when young people are asked about bullying, they most frequently name teasing and related verbal behaviors, including sexual harassment, as lying at the core of student-on-student aggression. This chapter discusses bullying, sexual harassment, and teasing and then examines the relationships between them.

Bullying

Bullying is the intentional injuring of one person by another. The damage can be physical, psychological, or both. Behaviors that young people identify as bullying include those intended to produce physical harm and those meant to create psychological fear.

Bullying is a significant problem in North American schools. Up to 15% of students in American schools are frequently or severely harassed by their peers (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). In a recent study of 17 rural school districts (Simanton, Burthwick, & Hoover, 2000), 13.8% of the students claimed to be victimized by peers during the 1997–1998

school year; another 14% reported that they had both bullied others and had been bullied. One sixth of the students (16.3%) admitted that they "picked on others." Only a slim majority of 4th through 12th graders in the same investigation (55.2%) reported neither having been picked on nor picking on others.

Bullying is more prevalent during the late elementary through middle school years. In North America it increases after the third grade (approximately age 8). The prevalence and severity of bullying attacks reaches a peak during the middle school years and then declines after eighth grade (Hoover et al., 1992; Hoover & Oliver, 1996).

More males than females are bullied. Males also self-report bullying others at significantly higher rates. However, as the rates for criminal forms of violence increase among females, the prevalence of bullying among girls may also rise. This is because mild aggression in schools (such as bullying) is related to more serious forms of aggression. A strong positive correlation exists between mild disciplinary contacts, such as bullying, and the number of crimes reported in America's schools. In other words, a school where there is considerable bullying (and remember that students view teasing as the most common form of bullying) will be at greater risk for violence (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Several researchers report that future arrest rates for more serious juvenile offenses can be predicted by rates of disciplinary contacts in the elementary years (Sprague, Sugai, Horner, & Walker, 1999; Walker, Stieber, Ramsey, & O'Neill, 1993; Walker & Sylwester, 1991). We have already seen that teasing during the elementary years is associated with sexual harassment later on (Stein, 1995).

European studies show little physical difference between bullies as a group and victims as a group (except, among males, in physical strength), but they do show distinct character differences. Bullies display an angry behavioral style, while victims tend to be sad and anxious. Bullies also tend to be stronger than average children and to approach the world with a chip on their shoulders. Victims, in contrast, are often depressed and fearful, especially in the face of social demands (Olweus, 1978, 1993).

When polled, American students agree that peer abuse can be traced to characteristics of victims. These results have been found both in studies where victims have been asked for the information (Hoover et al., 1992) and in those where students observed and rated the victimization of others (Hazler, Hoover, & Oliver, 1991). Generally speaking, young people believe that "students who do not fit in" are most at risk for becoming the target of bullying (Hoover et al., 1992). Students report that both physical and social factors contribute to victimization.

The trait of being emotional seems to mark some victims. Boys who are short-tempered appear to reward victimizers by reacting visibly to harassment (see also Hodges & Perry, 1996; Perry et al., 1988). Females who "cried or were emotional" would be taunted more than other students (Hoover et al., 1992; Hoover, Oliver, & Thomson, 1993). Many student victims believe they were bullied because of who their friends were—another social factor.

Social skills are an important predictor of who will tease, who will be teased, and who will handle verbal disputes well or poorly. Students who have trouble making friends or breaking into peer associations tend to experience more peer harassment (Hodges & Perry, 1996). Students with close friends report lower

levels of harassment and appear better able to surmount peer conflicts. The good news is that the abilities to make friends and insert oneself appropriately into peer gatherings are skills that can be successfully taught to troubled youngsters (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1980).

Sexual Harassment and Other Gender Issues

The legal definition of sexual harassment includes two components, either or both of which may be present. The first, called *quid pro quo*, refers to the required exchange of sexual favors for job advancement or access to programs. The second element is known as *hostile environment.* In hostile-environment sexual harassment, sexual touching and verbal behavior interfere with an individual's access to an environment or program (Thomas, 1998).

It is in hostile-environment sexual harassment that teasing comes into play. Teasing of a sexual nature or teasing about a person's appearance can easily produce a hostile environment, though it is not easy to determine the point at which harmless kidding becomes harassment. According to experts on sexual harassment, no clear line between harmless kidding and a hostile environment can be drawn. The hostile environment, like many other communication issues, exists largely in the eye of the beholder. The test that the courts have accepted is that a "reasonable person" would view the verbal behavior as harassing (Stein, 1995; Thomas, 1998).

Attitudes toward gender and gender roles affect bullying—both in terms of the risk for being victimized and in terms of the form the bullying takes (Laycock, 1996). Shakeshaft et al. (1995)

discovered that females seen either as (1) *more* or (2) *less* physically attractive than other girls were at the highest risk for harassment. Males whose gender-related behaviors were seen as atypical were at a much greater risk for peer abuse than were other young men (Onken, 1998; Shakeshaft et al., 1995). This may prove to be a threat to physical safety when schools and communities foster or do not discourage gay bashing. Young men who are "outed" as homosexuals or who are accused of homosexuality are at much greater risk for physical and psychological injury in public schools (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Teasing based on the failure to acquiesce to gender-based stereotypes begins very early in the lives of both boys and girls: "This phenomenon creates devaluation . . . and encourages acts of violence at the individual level. . . . Jokes beget harassment begets threats beget violence" (Onken, p. 13).

Teasing that crosses over into sexual harassment is inappropriate, and adult caregivers must take a clear stand against such verbal abuse. Verbal sexual harassment creates a hostile environment that prevents its victims from enjoying the benefits of schools and their programs. It is not necessary that the verbalizations suggest that sexual favors must be exchanged for access. Constant harassment about body types and sexual preferences or activities, along with sexual references and sexual stories, can produce a hostile environment. The most straightforward approach for adults to take may be to gently discourage such statements among younger children. With older youngsters, mild consequences should be imposed.

Teasing

Teasing is an ambiguous term for experts as well as for parents and teachers. At one and the same time, it can be a method

for reducing social distances, for expressing strong emotions in situations where this might otherwise be difficult, and for cruelly taunting and harming others. Consider the following contrasting statements:

- While teasing can be cruel, it actually helps them [young people] make their way in larger groups, either in the neighborhood or at school (Kantrowitz, 1993, p. 164).
- The teasing has turned Laura from a self-assured child into one who's worried about how she fits in (Schindler, 1998, p. 101).

How can both things be true? How can teasing be both a pleasurable and natural part of growing up *and* a form of cruelty? The answer lies in the individual differences between children—teasers, teasees, and those who may be both.

Trying to define teasing. Teasing is an insulting or outwardly angry remark often paired with a positive nonverbal or situational cue. In a sense, teasing represents a primitive version of irony or satire. When a 3-year-old says to a much beloved and admired adult, "You're silly," it is the incongruity of the remark that (potentially) renders it harmless or amusing.

Teasing contains elements of humor, whereas the pure insult is free of this component. The problem with teasing is that young people learn the rules of social exchanges at different rates. The result of this is that a "tease" is frequently construed as insulting, even when it is not meant in this spirit. Teasing lends itself to being misunderstood because of its subtlety. It is often difficult to divorce hostility from humor. Layers of such emotions as anger and jealousy lie at the heart of much teasing. Even when young

people want to separate humor from hostility, they may lack the linguistic skills to do so.

Teasing motivates social exchanges in four ways, according to Todd (1997). First, teasing can reduce social distance between partners. Affection can be expressed and barriers (between a child and an angry parent, for example) can be reduced via the application of humor. Recently, Hoover's teenage son headed off a threatened lecture about breaking a door by saying, "I sense that you feel strongly about this." This, as it happened, was something Hoover often said to his son, and the turnaround brought laughter and relief to both parties.

Second, teasing often involves what Todd calls "intellectual sparring." That is, it allows participants to determine one another's linguistic and cognitive styles and to gauge intentions. Among males, particularly, this use of jocularity and teasing-type humor encourages social ice-breaking.

Third, teasing can be used to increase social distance—that is, to keep others at a safe emotional distance. Finally, teasing can be a means of assessing or changing the emotional atmosphere. For example, a tense situation can be lightened by a teasing exchange.

Appendix B on page 113 is a checklist for parents and teachers to use in deciphering the motivational aspects of teasing episodes. Understanding the teaser's purpose may help an adult act wisely in dealing with a teasing situation.

Learning to accept teasing. As preschool children learn about teasing, they also learn a repertoire of social skills for accepting it. Most youngsters learn that ignoring the teasing or "giving back" with their own humorous exchanges is a way to

deflect insults that may be hidden in the otherwise humorous message. For example, most youngsters in one study rated teasing as "fun" (Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). In another study, even a majority of children who claimed that teasing often equaled bullying nonetheless agreed that "most teasing is done in fun, not to hurt" (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994).

A minority of children, perhaps around 10% during the elementary years (Hodges & Perry, 1996), fail to develop the social skills necessary for dealing with good-natured teasing. These youngsters tend to approach the world anxiously and to react to teasing emotionally. Unfortunately, this response style may lead to more teasing—and it may produce a situation where other youngsters begin to find a sort of sinful pleasure in crossing the line from teasing to something more aggressive.

Visible signs of emotion on the part of teasees (quivering voice, shaking hands, crying) can have several effects. First, the teaser may feel rewarded. Some teasers find that emotional arousal of victims by itself is rewarding. The laughter of bystanders can also reward the teaser. Second, teasers learn that this particular child is an "exciting" victim. The child who reacts emotionally becomes a magnet for teasers, as if wearing a placard saying "teasing will be rewarded here." Finally, there is escalation. Teasers who enjoy the rewards of humiliating others will up the ante by converting teasing to its more intense and mean-spirited relative, taunting.

At one level, the inability to deal with teasing in an adaptive fashion is clearly an example of an undeveloped or missing social skill (Feldman & Dodge, 1987). Certainly, children who are teased frequently—and who seem by their behavior to provoke more

direct verbal and physical attacks—can be taught to respond more appropriately. Indeed, that is a theme of this book. However, as children are learning the appropriate coping mechanisms, it is important for caring adults to understand that these children have the right to be left alone (Ross, 1996). Adults must be sensitive to that right.

The Relationship Between Teasing and Bullying

In several studies, we asked students to rate both the degree to which they had been bullied and the types of peer abuse they had experienced (Hoover et al., 1992; Hoover et al., 1993; Oliver et al., 1994). Two facts consistently emerged from these investigations. First, teasing and verbal harassment were the two behaviors most consistently identified as the bullying that students experienced or saw others experience. Second, students who were teased and otherwise verbally harassed were no less traumatized than students experiencing occasional mild physical harassment. Words in this case were as powerful as actions.

The range of offensive verbal behavior that is allowed as part of an institution's social climate predicts the amount of more dangerous violence that will occur in that environment. There is some indication that several perpetrators of school shootings such as the 1999 tragedy in Columbine, Colorado, were frequent victims of verbal harassment (Katz, 2000). Their outbursts of rage may have been partly caused by school and social climates that permitted constant verbal oppression of weaker students by stronger peers. Some reports have indicated that students high in a school's pecking order feel an entitlement to pick on physically or psychologically weaker students. Johnson Institute fellows, in their *Respect and Protect* materials, describe a situation in which

a dangerous level of violence is "enabled" by adults' failure to intervene in milder forms of aggression such as put-downs (Johnson Institute, 1996). It is clear that bullying is not something to be taken lightly.

Chapter Summary

- Bullying, the intentional infliction of psychological and/or physical harm, often includes verbal forms that children identify as teasing.
- Sexual harassment is related to bullying and teasing. It is best dealt with directly, with dissuasion and consequences, starting at a young age.
- Teasing serves many social and language-based purposes. Although one such purpose may be to inflict pain, others include breaking social ice and providing an opportunity for verbal banter and play.
- Children can be taught to respond more appropriately to being teased, but we must not run the risk of blaming the victim. *Children have a right to be left alone.*

Chapter 3

Child Development and Teasing

CENTRAL TO DEALING WITH TEASING is understanding the perspective of growing children and adolescents. For example, it turns out that children who participate in intentionally—and even unintentionally—cruel teasing may not thoroughly understand the devastation that their words produce. In other words, these children may lack *empathy*, the ability to identify with the emotions of others. It is important for parents and teachers to know that the development of empathy might be beyond the ability of most children before the age of 7 and sometimes beyond the ability of many older youngsters (Cole & Cole, 1996).

The analysis and summary of child development that we offer in this chapter is based largely on two excellent and highly recommended volumes: *The Development of Children* (Cole & Cole, 1996) and *Understanding Children* (Schickendanz, Hansen, & Forsyth, 1990). We have also consulted a set of chapters edited by Fuller and Olsen (1998).

First Years (Ages 1 to 4)

Children's language skills develop rapidly between the onset of language and the age of 5. Children begin to understand words and expressions at around 9 months and produce recognizable words between 11 and 13 months. Multi-word phrases enter the picture at about 12 months. Most youngsters are able to label hundreds of objects and people by the time they are 3 years old.

As toddlers' language skills improve, the opportunity for teasing increases, particularly if they have siblings, are in a childcare setting, or participate in a play group. Todd (1997) noted that learning to tease is a developmental milestone that "we are propelled toward as naturally as learning to walk" (p. 8). Teasing starts between the ages of 2 and 3. This is also the time for parents, teachers, and caregivers to initiate the *frames and scripts model* (see chapters 6 and 7).

Adults may want to observe the nature of the teasing. Is it meant to be funny, or does it seem mean-spirited? Sometimes taunting that continues when the teasee becomes upset can be taken as evidence of cruel intent. Occasionally, the selection of particularly sensitive topics can provide this evidence. The exchange could represent some combination of an immature effort to express humor and the desire to ridicule the other child. All of these purposes and emotions will exist at a very rudimentary level, and children will have very little conscious understanding of their own motivations. Preschool-aged children are likely to be baffled by "why" questions from adults.

The best adults can do is to gently but consistently reprimand unkind behavior with simple expressions of why they do not approve, simultaneously relating these statements to the value

system of the household or group setting. We have employed the notion of *scripts* to offer phrases for adults to use in communicating with children about these events. In the beginning, the words and phrases should be very simple and straightforward. Adults should use words already familiar to the child or should define and teach new terms at this point. Repetition is important in working with this age group.

Empathy plays a great role in our approach to teasing for later ages. For this group, however, identifying with or even recognizing the emotions of others may be impossible. Parents can jumpstart the move toward empathy by making such statements as, "Sara's feelings were hurt by what you said." Note that in using this phrase the adult models *out loud* the thought processes of a mature problem-solver: *My words may have hurt someone.*

Variations on this theme can also be introduced fairly early in children's lives. For example, adults can verbalize the way they pick up cues revealing injury:

- *I knew Charlie's feelings were hurt because he was crying.*
- *When I saw Sally run away, I knew the teasing had made her feel bad.*

Warning: It is important to avoid dwelling too much on these situations, as adults may inadvertently communicate how powerful teasing can be. Certain youngsters may be attracted to this component of teasing and be encouraged, rather than discouraged, by an adult overreacting to a teasing situation.

Play stages. Teasing is more likely to occur as children go through the different stages of play. Children engage in solitary play from ages 1 to 2 and parallel play from 2 to 3. During the parallel

stage, two children will play side-by-side yet never engage each other in their separate activities. Each child seems to be in a world of his or her own. However, even children at this stage will engage in teasing behavior if they know that the behavior will result in a reward—attention, maybe, or access to a preferred toy or space (once the other youngster is successfully driven away).

Teachers' attitudes play a major role in determining the extent of teasing and bullying in a school or classroom (Olweus, 1993). Researchers have found that, for the most part, teachers do relatively little to halt bullying. Children generally do not like the teasing behavior of other children and do want adult intervention. Froschl and Sprung (1999) have identified the following methods caregivers can use in dealing with teasing and bullying in this age group:

1. Talk about teasing and bullying.
2. Have children help decide on the classroom rules.
3. Engage in noncompetitive games.
4. Conduct daily quieting activities.
5. Introduce this simple rule: *Do not tease when the other person does not want you to. Ask the other person if teasing is O.K.*

Of course, we would add the notion of *scripts and frames.* At this point in a child's development, when language is just beginning, adults must introduce the words—*scripts*—that children will later use in problem solving. Children who are taught early to recognize teasing and its results and to use words to describe what they experience are unlikely to have problems with it later in life.

Early Elementary Years (Ages 5 to 8)

Children's speech is well developed by age 5, and their information-processing style has become more systematic and powerful. At this stage they acquire the ability to internalize problem-solving methods and show increased ability to express needs and concerns verbally. In fact, their vocabulary averages around 1,500 words by age 5, and by age 7 they can competently use up to 10,000 words. During the early elementary years, children also begin to recognize humor in jokes and enjoy making up funny stories.

By kindergarten, most children begin to make real friends and engage in group play. They are able to follow simple directions and will work to please their parents. Youngsters during the early years of school physically and verbally demonstrate affection and caring. They are much more capable of handling complex social skills than they were before age 5.

Between the ages of 5 and 8, children engage in teasing more frequently and experience being teased more often. Again, adults must help children understand the context of teasing and also help them know when kidding is appropriate. An important feature of the approach to teasing at this age is to introduce and persistently reinforce the central ideas that (1) teasing can be hurtful and that (2) certain factors (which they can begin learning) predict when teasing exchanges will go awry. We use the *frames and scripts* methods detailed in chapters 6 and 7 when explaining these issues to youngsters.

Gender differences take on a real importance during the early elementary years. As Voss (1997) observes, children who are still interacting in first grade will have moved to gender-separate groups by grade 3. Voss adds that

> although girls initiate teasing episodes nearly as often as their male peers, boys are more critical of the girls' activities and behaviors, and their teasing comments verge closer to ridicule. Although the initiator provides subtle cues, such as laughter or smiles, the target incorporates less humor in his/her responses. (p. 244)

Voss points out that by third grade, boys use teasing to distance themselves from girls, and the form or style of teasing becomes harsher. Girls and boys do not interact very often at this age, and when a boy-girl pair become friends other boys tease them, making it difficult for adult caregivers to foster healthy cross-gender connections.

Intermediate Grades (Ages 9 to 11)

At this age behavior becomes noticeably less egocentric. This reduction in self-centeredness combines with rapid cognitive growth to permit a breathtaking increase in the ability to take on others' perspectives. It is at this age that empathy grows most rapidly, though it will probably not reach its peak until after age 11.

Youngsters in the intermediate grades also show increased memory, probably due to a rapid growth in their awareness of what they need to do to learn and memorize. There are also certain moral rules that are now in place about what people, including children, should or should not do. Because of their developmental level, their moral understandings show a rigidity that does not allow for a great deal of interpretation.

Great social changes occur between the ages of 9 and 11. Children develop strong friendships based on mutual interests, and these friendships easily turn into cliques with strong "insider-

outsider" sensibilities. Peer relationships and social status are important for both boys and girls. Some children may not be part of a clique and may be excluded and then teased because of this exclusion. This teasing can be very hurtful because it emphasizes their exclusion and loneliness.

Appearance and personal hygiene also become important to both boys and girls during the intermediate grades. It has been estimated that up to 80% of the teasing children experience at this age has to do with the enforcement of appearance standards (Todd, 1997).

Gender roles become much more distinct during the later elementary years, mainly because of the interaction between biological changes, cultural attitudes toward gender roles, and the school environment. Gender separation becomes more formalized. As boys and girls change physically, they are more apt to be teased about some of those changes or about an absence of changes.

According to one expert (Harris, 1990), males during the later elementary years (and beyond) are more likely to tease and taunt in same-sex social groupings because they have not been taught or encouraged to reveal personal information. The teasing, in effect, is a way to break through social barriers. These joking relationships start in the primary grades and are refined by the time males reach the upper-elementary level. "Joshing" verbal exchanges can backfire, though, if signals are not clearly understood. Because rule-governed thinking remains rigid at this age, many boys will have trouble understanding why the joshing they use with other boys may strike girls as offensive.

Between ages 9 and 11, children readily play games with rules and in more formal and structured settings. Games tend to be less spontaneous, perhaps reflecting the rule-governed moral system that develops in these years. Activities, both formal and informal, often feature competition rather than cooperation. The degree to which competition is emphasized around intermediate-aged youngsters probably influences the likelihood that their verbal playfulness will translate into taunting, threats, or insults.

The pace of physical development accelerates after age 9; youngsters become increasingly strong, coordinated, and agile. Gender-related differences in motor skills become more noticeable now. Girls display superior fine motor skills, while their male counterparts tend to be better in activities requiring physical strength and gross motor movement.

Kutner (1995) observes that many parents make three common mistakes when dealing with teasing among children of this age. First, adults often blame children for inappropriate verbal behavior. These occurrences should instead be seen as opportunities for teaching about social skills. Second, adult caregivers often "swoop down" on bullying situations and attempt to avenge the wrongdoing. Such actions take the responsibility for learning self-control out of children's hands. (This observation does not, of course, mean that parents should not intervene when youngsters are unable to resolve the problem or when one child is obviously suffering distress.) Third, Kutner advises adults *not* to teach children to respond physically (as in hitting back). Such a response can place vulnerable children in situations where already damaged egos can be even more degraded.

In the past, many parents and teachers told children just to ignore someone who was teasing them, explaining that teasers would eventually go find someone else to pester or would become bored and quit. Kutner (1995) writes that ignoring may not work: "Instead of going away, the teasers will just keep upping the ante, saying nastier and nastier things until they get a reaction" (p. 90). In addition, from the social-skills training perspective we advocate in this book, we would argue that when getting away from a bully or ignoring him or her *is* effective, it is effective because an adult has problem-solved with a child and taught the behaviors necessary for successfully getting away or ignoring.

Middle School Years (Ages 12 to 14)

The formal operations (FO) stage of cognitive development begins at about age 12 (though individual differences become magnified at this age in cognitive development). Thinkers at the FO stage can deal effectively with the world of ideas and logic. Their thinking no longer needs to be tied completely to the world of objects. Whereas a typical 10-year-old would have trouble thinking about a concept such as human dignity, her 13-year-old counterpart finds the exercise natural. Thus, much of the human-relations vocabulary developed in the *frames and scripts* approach up to this stage can be used with teens to think about possible consequences, others' feelings, and moral dilemmas (see chapters 6 and 7).

It is in this age group that empathy really comes into play. While many teens still feel that their own struggles lie at the center of the universe, they do possess the mental ability to think about others' experiences. Caring adults can, with patience, take teens "out of themselves" by talking about the consequences of teasing. Students at this age gain the ability to predict the effects

of their actions on others—*if* adults have laid the proper groundwork and *if* teens are asked to do so.

Gender relationships take on an entirely new dimension as these young people mature. Boys catch up to girls somewhat in their interest in relationships. Relationship speech can also result in rumor mongering, which can be stressful and unpleasant. Rapid physical changes produce some social and psychological stresses. While teasing associated with puberty issues can be fun for some—it can serve to "break the ice" in discussions of difficult topics—it can be extremely painful for others.

High School and Beyond (Ages 15 and Up)

By age 15, teenagers are well into the formal operations stage of cognitive development and able to think about ways of dealing with moral issues. There is more and more peer interaction, and peers have more and more influence on each other. There are also relationship and sexuality issues between boys and girls.

The relationship between parents and children begins to change at this age. Young adolescent children usually feel the need to distance themselves somewhat from adults as part of the development of an independent identity (Erikson, 1968). Consequently, teens become less likely to tell their problems to adults—even when this might still be useful. The situation may even cause parents to feel they are pitted against peers. There is a tremendous amount of pressure at this age to conform. Teasing is often directed at those who, for whatever reason (inclination, cultural background, socioeconomic status), do not conform.

In our research on bullying, we have found that many teens feel an internalized group pressure to enforce standards of behavior,

dress, and appearance. This pressure causes endless problems for youth, particularly during the middle school years, because they feel a simultaneous drive to experiment with identities and lifestyles.

We interviewed a young woman who came to our attention because of taunting she received from her peers during the middle school years. Joan's experimentation with lifestyles included the declaration that she was a Wiccan; she also embraced the gothic style of dress and dark, heavy makeup. When we met her, Joan presented a striking appearance; she was very tall for her age; had black fingernails, lank hair, and a long flowing dress; and wore blue-tinged lipstick. She was desperately sad—wanting to be liked by her fellow students, or at least understood, yet desiring the freedom, as she put it, to be herself. Such stories are quite common among adolescents as they balance the drive for distinctive identities with the equally strong ache for acceptance.

Chapter Summary

- Teasing behavior begins to occur between the second and third year of life and appears to be a normal part of language development.
- Adults must employ consistent vocabulary when talking to children under age 8 about teasing and taunting. This vocabulary development lies at the heart of the *frames and scripts model* and serves as the foundation for later, more complex approaches to dealing with teasing.

(continued)

Chapter Summary (continued)

- It is important to voice the rule that children are not to tease if playmates are bothered by it. It is the teaser's responsibility to note when his or her behavior causes stress. After age 8 most children can be taught about the effects of teasing.
- At around age 11, most children are able to consider the feelings of others. Moral understanding becomes more complex, and the effects of teasing behavior can be understood abstractly.
- Adolescents may experience pressure to conform to peer expectations rather than to parental desires. Much of the taunting and harassment teens experience relates to issues of conformity.

Chapter 4

Thinking and Talking About Teasing

BECAUSE CHILDREN CAN BE DEVASTATED BY TEASING, parents and educators must make a commitment to respond to instances of verbal abuse. They will need to develop a personal verbal style that shows positive regard for others and avoids sarcasm and even, in certain cases, irony. This approach also embraces the notion that young people should not only be allowed, but also encouraged to resolve conflicts at the level for which they are developmentally ready. Adult intervention should be largely proactive, with children carrying more of the responsibility in disputes related to teasing as their language and analysis skills develop. Young people who consistently harass peers should be allowed to experience the natural and logical consequences incurred by their behavior. These issues are addressed in the following pages. Parents and educators may also want to refer to Appendix A on page 109—the Initial Adult Caregiver Attitude Checklist.

There Is No "Right to Tease"

It is easy to be annoyed with students who remain thin-skinned about good-natured ribbing. They are sometimes accused

of lacking a sense of humor or of being immature in their handling of the rough-and-tumble give-and-take of verbal playfulness. Nonetheless, conclusive evidence exists that certain children—those who generally respond to the world with anxiety and trepidation—are most likely to be picked on (Hodges & Perry, 1996; Olweus, 1993). Many of these vulnerable children find it difficult to handle even the most well-intentioned teasing.

A central principle of our approach is that such individuals possess a *right to be left alone.* The wishes of these children should be honored, regardless of whether they express this wish verbally or through some other behavior (such as crying), whether adult caregivers and teasers believe that the exchange was made positively, or whether the desire to be left alone was expressed in a socially appropriate fashion. We encourage adult caregivers to favor vulnerable children's preferences in this regard.

Saying No to Teasing

Once we understand that teasing can be devastating under certain circumstances and that verbal aggression can be a precursor of more dangerous forms of violence, we have the responsibility to intervene in teasing and bullying situations. Children and youth should be encouraged whenever possible to participate in these interventions at whatever level is available to them. Even so, it remains the responsibility of caregivers to gently stop or prevent youngsters from verbally tormenting others.

Teachers must remain aware that even mild aggression or violence, in the form of threats and persistent ridicule, can be detrimental to the classroom learning environment. Because of the relationship between classroom social climate and learning,

teachers must refrain from adopting a "kids-will-be-kids" attitude and must prevent fragile youngsters from being damaged by ridicule. Bullying is also common among siblings, so parents should not feel free to allow ongoing harassment in a family setting.

It is appropriate to adopt a zero-tolerance policy with regard to teasing about sexual issues—at least under circumstances where the teaser and teasee do not know each other well or where the recipient has expressed discomfort. As young people mature, the reasons for opposition to sexual-based innuendo can be made more explicit. However, most youngsters under the age of 10 or 11 will have a difficult time understanding the notion of a hostile environment, because they cannot separate the intent of their teasing (usually humor or an effort to break the dating ice) from the experience of the recipient. They tend to assume that if the message was sent with friendly intentions, it ought to be received in the same way.

It is essential that girls also be given the same message. Even though most teasing with sexual content is delivered by males, it may be a response to an exchange initiated by a female, which has gotten out of hand. Note that overreaction on the part of adults can actually make sexual teasing worse. Adult overreaction can sometimes be seen as rewarding, particularly by youngsters starved for adult attention. Overreaction can also emphasize the potency of language—perhaps investing teasing phrases with more power than they actually deserve. Because the line between sexually suggestive teasing and sexual harassment is so fine, adults may wish to consider a prohibition, among younger children, against *all* teasing that deals with body type or style.

Empathy, Bonding, and Showing Regard

Effective teachers and parents are able to empathize with the emotional states of young people. This is particularly important when children are having trouble expressing emotional distress verbally. In the early years, warm relationships with adults foster strength and health in children. For example, Staub (1996) has emphasized that children who bond with caregivers are more likely to become resilient and altruistic than those who don't.

In the domain of teasing and bullying, one of the primary effects of regard for children will be that adults involved in a teasing situation will adopt the stance, at least initially, that the *hurt from teasing is real.* Caregivers must acknowledge that something happened that produced hurt feelings and/or anger. They must not put down or trivialize what has occurred. It is possible that at a later time adults may realize that a child's behavior precipitated bullying or encouraged its continuation and may work with the child to change the behavior. Children may be ineffective in dealing with teasing once it occurs. Nevertheless, the initial reaction should be directed to "catching" the child who has fallen emotionally.

Understanding the Importance of Language Development

Many aspects of teasing involve the interpretation of linguistic information (such as irony or sarcasm), which may be beyond a child's level of understanding. This may explain why a certain child takes good-natured teasing as an offense, why another child cannot figure out why other children misunderstand his well-intended gibes, and why concerned adults may have a hard time discussing teasing and humor with children.

Perhaps the single most important issue in teaching children about interpersonal relationships—including bullying and teasing—is part-taking, or empathy. It is very difficult to ask a child below the age of 7 (or who has not yet reached the concrete operations stage) to empathize with others' hurt feelings. This is because empathy requires the ability to decenter. Decentering allows a person to consider more than one aspect of a problem at one time—to hold two or more conflicting concepts in mind simultaneously. Empathy requires that a child be able to recall her own emotions surrounding a situation and at the same time contemplate the possible response of the other party. Before age 7, and often beyond that age, youngsters' thinking is too egocentric to allow for empathy. Caregivers should still encourage them to attempt it. In fact, according to some scholars, cognitive growth takes place when children are asked to function one developmental stage beyond their current one (Beck, 1971).

A central piece of the puzzle for understanding and dealing with teasing is for parents and educators to acknowledge the power of language to hurt. As they get older, both children who tease and those who are frequent targets for teasing must come to understand, with help from caring adults, that the antidote to teasing or the uncomfortable feeling that comes from hurting others is also language based. With guidance, young people can learn to assert themselves when they are hurt. If they themselves are the aggressors, young people can learn to ask the target individual about their teasing and, depending on the answer or the other child's body language, consider changing their behavior.

Active Listening

A consistent finding about children who face life emergencies with inner strength is that some adult has attended to their needs and concerns. Children who are being picked on must believe that their problems are being taken seriously by those charged with their care. At the very least, this means that adults practice such listening skills as paraphrasing, offering periods of silence, adjusting eye contact, and generally being alert to the cultural sensitivities of their charges.

Observing Children's Behavior

Over and above listening to what children say, effective caregivers must "listen" to what youngsters *do*. Important clues about children's emotional frame of mind and their level of social skills and understanding may be discerned from facial expressions and physical attitudes.

Young boys' language is generally not as well developed as that of their female peers. Both bullying and reactions to bullying may be based on gross motor expression (making faces or using hand gestures) as opposed to verbalizations (Hoover & Milner, 1998). Other types of bullying may include pantsing (pulling students' pants down in public), swirlies (thrusting a child's head in the toilet), passing offensive notes, and creatively using bodily fluids, most often saliva.

Encouraging a Positive Verbal Style

It should come as no surprise to parents and teachers whose language style is irony-laden, caustic, or sarcastic that the language styles of the young people with whom they interact come

to resemble that of their guides and mentors. Unfortunately, the humor adults may see in irony is often lost on young people, who may merely hear and mimic the implicit insult. Most of the jokes in television situation comedies depend on verbal gibes that contain implicit or literal put-downs—comments that are often about physical appearance, behavior, or personality and are intended to lower the worth of the individuals they target. Research suggests that youngsters may not have the cognitive skills to understand that such messages are not meant to be taken literally (Cole & Cole, 1996). Parents and teachers should be careful about the messages they send with their own verbal styles.

Using Natural and Logical Consequences

Parents and teachers must monitor situations where youngsters are being teased and harassed unmercifully or where their skills or psychological resources for dealing with the teasing are not yet well developed. By gently but consistently applying consequences, adults teach young bullies which behaviors are appropriate and which are not. Mild, gentle, but consistent consequences for persistent teasing can provide excellent reinforcement for the social-skills training approach outlined in this book (see Table 4.1 for examples of gentle consequences). In a large-scale study of bullying in Norwegian schools, Olweus (1996) discovered that consequences for verbal bullying were a necessary component of an anti-bullying program. The information-based aspects of the program worked only when mild consequences were administered to youths who picked on others.

It must be remembered at all times that in disciplining children, adults are modeling certain aspects of relationships. For example, the role of power in relationships is an important feature

of bullying—and unfortunate messages about the advantages of basing relationships on power can be unwittingly transmitted though child-rearing practices. It is sometimes hard to be gentle in applying consequences for behavior that is not only socially inappropriate but physically dangerous. Given children's knack for mimicking behavior, however, it is worth the effort to learn methods for calm and humane correction.

It is important to apply consequences with as little emotional arousal as possible, so as to not model harsh corrective practices that are in themselves too much like bullying. In addition, a high degree of emotional arousal on the part of parents and teachers may impinge on the learning process by over-stimulating the child. Finally, some students may find it rewarding to pull adults' emotional strings and will actually increase their teasing.

Understanding the Importance of Humor

An extremely thin line divides legitimate verbal play and humor from teasing and bullying. No fast and easy rules exist for making the distinction—or for explaining it to children. However, a starting point for caring adults is to adopt the stance that josh-ing and good-natured verbal wordplay are central to normal development. Humor, in other words, is an essential component of life's quality. Children can be encouraged to appreciate the humor in situations involving themselves. There is perhaps no better antidote to the pain of teasing than an ability to laugh at oneself. Children also benefit from being taught that differing lev-els of sensitivity to and understanding of humor exist. For exam-ple, they need to know that not all people are equally delighted by irony.

Table 4.1

Gentle Consequences

The following examples of gentle consequences can be applied in situations where youngsters persist in mocking their peers:

- An object or toy that lies at the heart of the conflict could be temporarily put away.
- A preferred activity could be temporarily or permanently terminated. The adult might say, "I see that it is hard for you to stop hurting [pestering, putting down] Sally with words." (See chapters 6 and 7 for more details about language to use.) For example, a child could be separated for a time from birthday party festivities.
- Apologies could be elicited, if this is possible without entering a power struggle. This consequence is not recommended for children below the age of 8. An alternative could be to help the child rehearse and deliver a positive statement to the former victim.
- Consistent requests that a child stop teasing could be followed by temporary banishment from a setting such as the playground or dinner table.
- In a setting such as a youth soccer league, a teen who persists in ridiculing the efforts and abilities of teammates, even after several reminders, could be asked to skip the next game. In discussions, emphasis should be placed on the one-game penalty as a natural and logical outcome of the loss of teamwork that results when players ridicule one another.

Using a Social-Skills Training Approach to Problem Solving

We have often found it helpful to assume that a child's disorderly behavior results from a lack of skill in handling a situation rather than from an effort to be oppositional or "bad." Even where it can be demonstrated that a child knows the appropriate skill, he or she may not have practiced it enough to use it easily in an emotionally charged atmosphere. We encourage a certain degree of gentle, positive persistence by simply assuming that misbehavior presents an opportunity for instruction and practice in a new, more adaptive mode of problem solving.

We recently observed a mother interacting with a boy of about 4 or 5 who was demanding a candy bar he had noticed at the checkout counter. She patiently reminded the child that they had a rule about "how we ask for things in our family." She then rehearsed with the child a simple rule that could be paraphrased as *We ask for things once or twice and then go to our room if we are still upset.* She added, in a matter-of-fact tone, "It is O.K. for you to be upset and you may rest if you need to when we get home." She went about her business and the youngster soon relaxed, emitting only a couple of final whimpers. In similar situations, effective parenting lies in accepting children's occasional unpleasant persistence as normal, while avoiding a punitive mindset. Although this may fall into the "easier said than done" category, most parents do have the psychological skills to outlast their children's behavioral outbursts.

Completing a Values and Attitudes Checklist

Appendix A on page 109 is a list of the values and attitudes discussed in this chapter. It can be used as a self-check system for determining whether the attitudes caregivers hold match the values recommended in these pages. If a majority of the attitudes and preconditions match, you are likely to find the methods outlined in the following chapters quite helpful.

Chapter Summary

- No one has a right to tease.
- A regard for children provides the foundation for effectively handling teasing and taunting.
- Adults must cultivate an active listening style and an ability to read children's body language.
- It is important for adults to model a positive verbal style for children. Sarcasm and irony are often lost on young children.
- Whenever possible, consequences for inappropriate teasing and taunting should be logically and naturally related to the misbehavior.

Chapter 5

The Frames and Scripts Model

NOW WE ARE READY TO SET UP THE SCAFFOLDING for an overall approach to teasing. With a thorough understanding of the methods discussed in this chapter, parents and teachers who are creative and who communicate well with children should be able to effectively use the *frames and scripts model.* Those looking for more detailed information may wish to study chapters 6 and 7. Also available are Appendices C through E on pages 115–119, which are worksheets dealing with the skills and wording recommended in these pages. Adult caregivers who want to be certain they have the recommended skills may wish to work through these checklists carefully.

Introduction to the Model

The approach we advocate in these pages is based on the notion of teaching children skills that will ultimately help them develop a problem-solving attitude. After all, once students can plan and carry out strategies for dealing with verbal aggression, they will require less adult intervention. If this is to happen, adults' reactions to teasing must be consistent and must include a skills component. The skills component is heavily based on (a)

developing an understanding of situations where teasing goes awry and (b) developing language sequences and vocabulary for children as they learn to deal with teasing encounters.

The model offered here is a bridge between the philosophical positions outlined in chapter 3 and the notion of *frames* and *scripts*. Essential to the model is the use of language, in the form of *scripts*, to help "transfer" thinking about teasing from the adult problem-solver to the developing child problem-solver. Also essential is the notion of *frames*. *Frames* provide a tool adults can use in talking to children about situations where teasing goes awry.

Figure 5.1 offers a map of the approach that shows how adult problem-solving language is modeled for young people, translated into terms they understand, and absorbed into their own patterns of thought, where it develops into self-control and problem-solving ability.

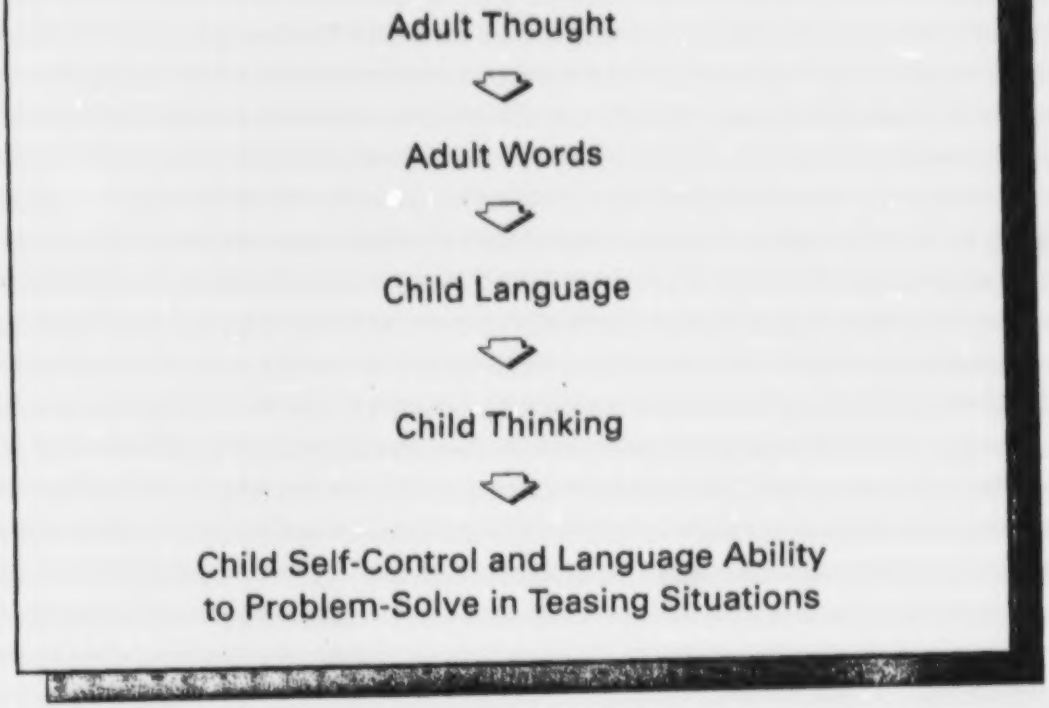
Using the Model

With the encouragement of concerned teachers and parents, young people should practice—out loud—statements related to solving problems with teasing. These statements should be rehearsed aloud until children can reproduce the script or plan from memory.

When children have practiced and role-played the solution to their bullying situations (as victims *or* bullies), the rehearsed problem-solving statements become an internalized approach to solving interpersonal problems. Children may even begin to employ the problem-solving sequences in situations other than those associated with teasing. Of course, patience on the part of adult caregivers is essential at this stage. Many reminders and practice

Figure 5.1

The Frames and Scripts Approach to Teasing and Harassment



sessions might be required before a child is able to use the strategies independently. It always helps to name the strategies, so that adults and children are on the same wavelength. For example, an adult, having established the relevant vocabulary, could gently remind a child to use "the ignoring strategy."

The end result should be that young people come to possess what have become their *own* skills for resolving problems. To the extent that this occurs, young people can be said to be self-directed: in dealing with teasing humanely they exert self-control.

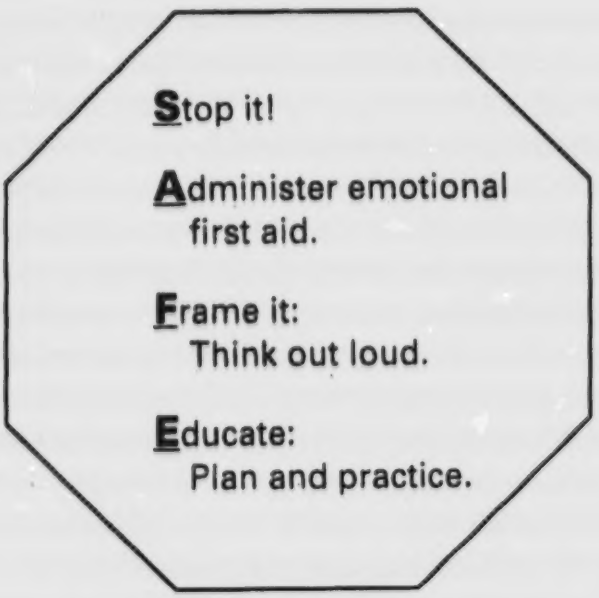
The SAFE Aspect of the Model

Adults usually encounter difficult teasing situations in two ways. First, they may directly observe a situation where teasing gets out of hand. Second, a child, usually the teasee, may approach the adult for help in a given situation. In either case, it would help if adult caregivers would remember the following acronym: SAFE (Stop it!; Administer emotional first aid; Frame it: think out loud; Educate: plan and practice [see Figure 5.2]). It is hard to stay clear-headed when a child approaches you in tears and distress; hence the memory trick. The following example illustrates the SAFE strategy in action:

> *The counselor at a Grand Forks elementary school worked out a reasonable plan for two fifth graders who had been bullied before school by some older boys. Though the students, not surprisingly, turned down offers of adult assistance, the counselor felt that the situation was sufficiently serious that it warranted her intervention. Because the bullying was a big enough concern that they brought it up repeatedly, she decided it needed to be* ***stopped.*** *Emotional first* ***aid was administered*** *when both sets of parents agreed that the boys had a right to be left alone and that it was O.K. for them to be upset by this unfair treatment.*
>
> *Once the boys had assessed the problem with adults (****framing it****), they agreed that they would move away from the older youngsters, enter school through a different door, and report back to their parents in one week (the specific plans of the* ***educate*** *step). Success was almost immediate. Perhaps because their newfound safety allowed them to feel emotionally distanced from the teasing, they ultimately befriended some of the older neighborhood boys. When one youngster's parents checked back with him after a few days and again after a few weeks, he reported feeling better and the*

Figure 5.2

The SAFE Plan for Responding to Incidents of Teasing



problem seemed to be a nonissue. His parents were especially pleased with his promise (which he carried out) to spend some time with the school counselor reviewing the series of events. The counselor recommended that he practice skills that could be employed in any similar situation.

Stop it! An adult must first **stop** the teasing. When the behavior is clearly cruel or out of hand in some other way, adults should stop it and separate the participants. If one of the children is clearly the aggressor, very mild consequences should be applied. The term *mild* implies that gentle forms of problem solving, as opposed to shows of power, are to be modeled. The following

methods are suggested. They must be adjusted to fit a child's individual needs and level of development.

- A firm statement stopping the behavior: "That is not O.K. at our house [in this classroom]." No evidence exists that such firm feedback, as long as it is not harsh, damages children. In fact, an overly permissive parenting style is most associated with the advent of aggression in children.
- A brief time spent rehearsing a previously learned problem-solving method, or a restatement of a prohibition worked out by the adult and that youngster.
- A brief timeout in the bedroom or other appropriate place. The minutes spent in timeout should be approximately the number of years in the child's age. Adults should underplay the level of their own emotions.
- Time away from a preferred toy or from a toy or activity at the heart of the teasing or dispute.
- A brief discussion of the nature of the problem and why it is a problem for the adult, along with a verbal commitment to a solution (appropriate for ages 7 and above).
- Depending on the child's age, an apology to the victim. This is very effective in reducing recurrence of the behavior, but a cooling-down period might be necessary first. The teaser should be left with his or her dignity—avoid power struggles at all costs.
- Separation of the combatants to allow for cooling off.

A slightly different approach to **Stop it!** is needed when dealing with an upset victim. Even before emotional first aid is applied,

it may be important to calm the child. Often, separating a child from teasers will accomplish this. However, it may also be important to coach the youngster to "take some deep breaths" and, for younger children, to use touches and holding to calm them.

Administer emotional first aid. The "A" reminds us to administer emotional first aid. Students who have been picked on often feel as if they have lost their dignity, and they are grieving for the loss of this part of their humanity. It is important that adult caregivers not skip this step.

Emotional first aid is, of course, most applicable to a child who feels he or she has been victimized. However, many teasers will be unpleasantly surprised when their teasing has been taken poorly. Students who tease others may also be upset that their behavior has brought them to the attention of an adult. Caregivers who have formed the habit of gentle child guidance practices may be surprised by how fearful some children are when initially confronted about their own misbehavior. The fear and resistance may be a result of unfortunate interactions with other adults. It is essential that caregivers be sensitive to this. However, it is also possible that an adult will need to impose consequences before administering emotional first aid to avoid an appearance of rewarding bullying behavior.

Providing emotional first aid means, above all, that the adult must take the child's part. That is, at least initially, the adult must believe the child who claims to have been hurt by words. Later will be soon enough to suggest that the child's social skills could be improved. An adult might discern ways in which a student contributed to the disagreement, but these issues can wait.

Adults who administer emotional first aid must pass along a sense that problems of this nature can be solved. Many children might feel that their situations are hopeless; they will not be reassured if caregivers voice the same pessimism.

Young people often feel that victims are punished for telling more often than bullies are punished for bullying. An adult who attempts to give first aid and utters the words "Don't be a tattletail" will completely break down any trust the child might have placed in him or her. When youngsters learn a set of skills, scripts, and plans—and when they are feeling emotionally stronger—caregivers can ask them to take more personal responsibility for problem solving. However, much groundwork needs to be laid first.

Part of the initial work for the adult may be to assure the child of his or her physical and psychological safety. It is essential at this initial stage to set up a plan that helps bullied students escape from their harassers while a more permanent solution is sought. The following suggestions have been proven useful in schools and other settings:

- Offer contingent observation: Assure the teased child that increased, but subtle, monitoring will be done.
- Provide, if necessary, an alternate entrance to the school or other facility that can be used for a short period.
- Move the child closer to the teacher, counselor, or parent.
- Identify a place where the child can go if the teasing becomes unbearable. Support the child who uses this location.

- Designate an adult to whom the child can report when feeling unsafe.
- Rehearse methods for quickly getting out of situations that are uncomfortable.

Frame it: Think out loud. This is the central step in our model. **Frame it** is shorthand for the skills-based *frames and scripts* approach around which this book is built. Here adult caregivers verbalize problem-solving steps aloud (using *scripts*) and use the *frames* idea to teach children how to think through the interpersonal problems created by teasing. We present the approach in three phases. More detailed treatment of *frames* and *scripts* can be found in chapters 6 and 7.

Phase one: Developing words. Before children can think productively about problems, they need a vocabulary for doing so. Adults can provide this vocabulary, introducing words and terms related to the needed problem-solving activities.

"Teasing" should be treated as a neutral term. The extremes of nasty or hurtful teasing can be indicated by terms like "taunting," "threatening," or "insulting." (For further suggested terminology, see chapter 7.) On the other end of the spectrum, teasing that is meant to be playful, humorous in an appropriate manner, or inclusive should be called "joshing," "joking," or "kidding." It will probably be necessary to use these terms repeatedly with children and to have them practice saying them back correctly.

The terms selected are less important than the agreement, by as many adults as possible in the life of a single child, to use the same words in consistent ways. It would be particularly useful if agreement could be negotiated between home and school.

The emphasis on vocabulary development and adult problem solving will begin with most children at approximately age 6 or 7. Students can start problem-solving actively with adults at this age.

Phase two: Making the transition. At this point, children are able to repeat verbatim statements about harm to victims (for teasers) and reasons why they are upset (for teasees) that include the vocabulary they have learned. Adults must take care to adopt language (length of phrases and complexity of word choice) that is appropriate to the child's level of understanding. The following phrases might be used with 7- to 11-year-olds:

- I think Luis might be sad because you teased him about his glasses. Maybe he worries about wearing glasses.
- Sometimes people become mad when others tease them about being fat.
- I would be angry if people called me stupid.

Appendix E on page 119 is a worksheet designed to help adults think through the language they will use with youngsters. We recommend that you read about *scripts* in chapter 7 before you use the worksheet.

During phase two, children's problem-solving behavior and understanding of teasing will be partially under their own control and partially under the control of concerned adults. Parents and educators will know that young people are ready for phase three when they begin to arrive independently at solutions to interpersonal problems. Note that reversion to earlier stages is likely to occur when problems prove either particularly insurmountable or when the emotional content of the situation is high. In either case, the adult must provide emotional first aid.

Phase three: Solving problems. Once the vocabulary has been established and useful phrases have been practiced, adults should encourage students to assume more responsibility for solving problems on their own. The responsibility of the adult in these situations is to elicit ideas for problem solving, provide feedback for student responses, and help students record their solutions. (Appendix C is a worksheet that adult mentors can use for this purpose with young people age 11 and older). Adult caregivers should provide checks and balances for the adequacy and effectiveness of the plan and should organize monitoring activities. With children under 11, adults will likely need to take responsibility for this stage, suggesting solutions, or actively helping students "discover" solutions for themselves. Depending on the child's maturation rate, independence in these skills may come even later than age 11.

Educate: Plan and practice. For years, adults have been telling children to ignore teasers or to get away from bullies. What they have typically not done, unfortunately, is to tell children *how* to get away from teasers. What children need is **education** in effective behavior. The approach described in this section will help adults offer this education to children and youth.

Adults often suggest certain words or phrases that can be used to extricate children from difficult situations, without practicing these with the children to what educators call a level of "overlearning." In overlearning, the skill is learned so well that it becomes second nature. Overlearning is suggested in the case of teasing because the real-life situation where the skill is to be deployed is likely to be extremely emotional.

Plans for teasees. Teaching the child to "give back" tease for tease is the strategy least likely to be effective. This is because,

particularly when the teasing is bullying, the bully will have selected the victim specifically on the basis of his or her inability to fight back. It would take a monumental effort to teach a chronic teasing victim to keep up with the verbal repartee of a bully! Consider and share the following short- and long-term plans for teasees. A variety of other resources for specific suggestions are available, and many of them are listed in Appendix F on page 121.

Short-Term Strategies for Teasees

- *Getting away from the situation.* Move to another place as quickly and quietly as possible, without a lot of fuss. The school staff may help. If so, go to a designated adult as calmly as possible.
- *Ignoring.* This may entail turning away, moving away, or responding to another verbal statement as if the teasing had not occurred. (A child employing this strategy will do best if the technique has been practiced beforehand.)
- *Responding with humor.* Many experts have noted that humor that deflects the teasing may eliminate it.
- *Using pre-rehearsed scripts.* Some of the scripts provided in chapter 7 may help children talk to themselves about situations where the teasing is *not* meant to be hurtful or where the abusive content of the verbalization is relatively mild.

Long-Term Strategies for Teasees

- *Relaxation techniques.* These are methods to help students relax when they are experiencing stressful

situations at school. The parent or teacher can help by "inoculating" the child against emotional arousal by role-playing the typical teasing event in increasingly intense rehearsals. Never accelerate role playing if the child is unable to maintain relaxed voice and body language.

- *Assertive responses.* A variety of assertive responses can be taught to the child, all based on the theme that "I don't appreciate the teasing about _____." This approach will probably have to be teamed with role playing, because it is essential that youngsters be able to keep their voice steady, make and retain eye contact, and speak firmly though not aggressively.
- *Political action.* For many older students, a proactive stance in combating physical and verbal violence in institutions can be very therapeutic. Young people can, with adult guidance, pressure administrators, talk to school board representatives, and speak up in student forums about problems of bullying and verbal harassment. Knowledge of Title IX sexual harassment issues can be particularly helpful, as a considerable amount of verbal bullying in school refers to sexuality issues, including allusions to homosexuality among boys. Such allusions are likely to be illegal. Students can easily be introduced to social organizers and community activists.
- *Simple remedies.* Sometimes minor changes can make a major difference: a more grown-up lunch box for a fourth grader or contact lenses instead of glasses for

an older child. It is important that these changes be the result of joint planning between the child and the adult, because in some cases suggesting such changes could be perceived as blaming the victim.

- *Global remedies.* If inappropriate teasing is a school-wide problem, parents might consider advocacy for their youngsters—presenting the issues to administrators or to the school board. Remember that the overall climate of the school is closely related to how well children learn and how safe they are. This is a message that bears repeating!

Plans for teasers. Parents are often shocked and even resistant when told that their youngsters are teasing others. Nonetheless, it is essential that they deal with these issues, especially if the teasing is cruel. Children who habitually pick on others—those who base their relationships entirely on power—are much more likely to experience a miserable adulthood and, as we have seen, may be at increased risk of engaging in criminal activity later in life.

Short-Term Strategies Adults Can Use With Teasers

- *End the teasing.* Gently but consistently stopping the teasing is essential if adults are to communicate their values about the treatment of others.
- *Use scripts.* Use the scripts shown in chapter 7 to help the child develop empathy for the victim.
- *Help with an apology.* Rehearse with the teaser a straightforward apology to the victim. The apology should then be delivered in the presence of an adult.

Long-Term Strategies Adults Can Use With Teasers

- *Use frames.* Work with the child to understand the reasons a teasing situation went astray. This strategy is discussed in depth in chapter 6, and a worksheet for practicing this skill is provided as Appendix D on page 117.
- *Rehearse scripts.* Perhaps the most important thing for a chronic teaser to learn is to **think before you tease.** The youngster must be taught to identify those situations or urges that trigger teasing and then, instead of teasing, to consider at least the following questions:

  Am I comparing the person to an object or animal?

  Is the person likely to object to what I am going to say?

  Have I asked the person whether they like to be teased?

  Is the situation likely to produce hard feelings?

  Is this a person who usually has trouble with teasing?

  Is the person having a bad day?

  If the answers to any of the above questions suggest that the teasing is inappropriate (a "yes" to all questions except question 3), the individual is encouraged to exert self-control and **refrain** from teasing.
- *Rehearse consequences.* Review with a child the consequences of his or her actions. Discuss consequences for the victim and consequences for the teaser, including those gentle consequences you have decided to use as deterrents to further misbehavior.

Chapter Summary

- The model for adult intervention in problem teasing situations is **SAFE**: **S**top it!; **A**dminister emotional first aid; **F**rame it: Think out loud; and **E**ducate: Plan and practice.
- Short-term strategies recommended for teasees include getting away from the situation, using planned methods for ignoring it, responding with humor, and using preset language scripts.
- Long-term strategies for helping teasees include relaxation techniques, assertive responses, political action, minor physical and/or behavioral changes, and parent advocacy.
- Short-term strategies for helping teasers include ending the teasing, teaching use of *scripts*, and helping with apologies.
- Long-term strategies for teasers and for helping students reduce teasing behavior include using *frames* (helping students understand why others are offended), practicing self-questioning scripts, and rehearsing negative outcomes of teasing others.

Chapter 6

Frames

THE HEART OF THE MODEL FOR DEALING WITH TEASING from a social development/social skills perspective consists of a pair of concepts called *frames* and *scripts*. The term *frame* refers to the symbolic space around a pair of young people involved in a teasing episode. It is a way for parents to talk with their youngsters about feelings and motives of both teasers and teasees. Factors predicting that a given individual will react agreeably to a verbal exchange are said to **enlarge the frame**. Likewise, factors that **narrow the frame** are those that limit the recipient's ability to emotionally handle verbal exchanges. As employed here, the term *scripts* refers to words and phrases introduced by parents or teachers specifically for the purpose of talking about teasing.

A Concrete Model for Young People

The notion of *frames* is a metaphor used to illustrate the concept that teasing verbal exchanges can have multiple interpretations, depending on who is doing the interpreting. We all know that it is easier to explain the concept of "car" to young children than the concept of "freedom," because the former can be shown

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physically, whereas "freedom" can be explained only by means of other words. Many of the concepts in the interpersonal domain are like "freedom"—that is, they are abstract and difficult to explain. The central theme of the *frames* approach is to use a physical element (a picture or window frame) to explain otherwise abstract ideas (see Figure 6.1).

The Mysteries of Humor

Parents and teachers will recognize that appreciation of humor moves through a fairly predictable developmental sequence featuring, at a very early age, sudden movements and proceeding to the infamous "bodily functions" stage. What is unclear is how these stages of humor match up with emerging cognitive abilities and psychosocial development. This makes it hard to predict a child's ability to understand and emotionally handle the gentle form of teasing often referred to as "kidding." Even though it is hard to explain such kidding to children, if we are to help children deal with teasing, this is just what we must do.

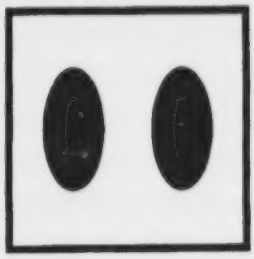
Consider this exchange: Sally, 13, walks up to Bob, 12, and carelessly remarks, "Hey, chubs. How're ya doin'?" Will the remark be seen as an inclusive attempt to engage a friend in conversation or a nasty attack on Bob's sense of self? To answer the question, we must consider three influential factors:

1. the personality, personal characteristics, and experiences of the person being teased
2. the topic(s) of the teasing
3. the relationship between the teaser and the teasee

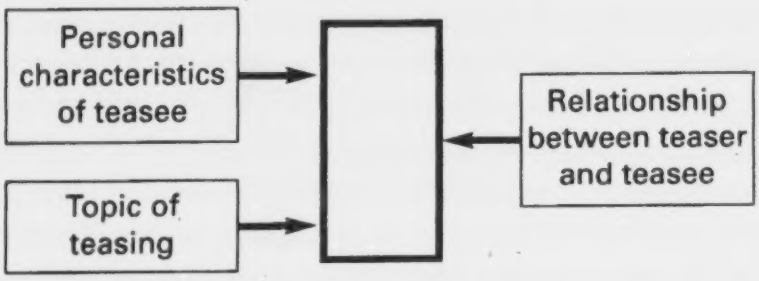
Figure 6.1

The *Frames* Concept

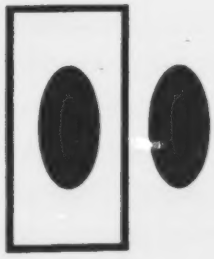
A. If both people are in the frame together, they may be able to tease one another.



B. Some factors can narrow the frame.



C. When the frame narrows, one person is in the frame and the other is out. In this case, teasing will probably not be O.K. Teasing will probably result in a misunderstanding.



Within certain predictable developmental constraints, children can learn about these factors and use them to (a) predict how a comment will be received and (b) analyze situations once they have occurred.

Use of the visual metaphor of a frame—a window frame, a picture frame, a mirror—allows adults to talk with youngsters about complicated relational concepts. A larger frame indicates a situation where the three factors will likely make an exchange positive. In a positive exchange, teaser and teasee are *in the frame* together (see Figure 6.1). A smaller frame indicates that a statement or joke might be negatively received. In that case the teaser will be in the frame, but the teasee will be outside. We need to examine which factors will enlarge the frame and which will shrink it (see Table 6.1 for a summary of these factors).

Factors Related to the Teasee

Whether a verbal exchange will be positively or negatively received (i.e., whether both participants will be *in the frame*) is partially dependent on characteristics of the person receiving the message. Some of these characteristics are relatively subtle, making communication about them very difficult, but no less important.

Individuals differ in personality. It is important that from the earliest age young people be encouraged to think (i.e., talk to themselves) about how their peers will perceive a teasing verbalization. In addition, the concept of *frames* can be employed to help a recipient of teasing understand why he or she was hurt by an exchange.

Differences in emotionality can be observed nearly from birth. Researchers use the term *temperament* rather than *personality* to

explain these differences in personal style. Some evidence exists that these individual differences may be organic, that is, wired into the human system. Experts such as Field (1990) have observed infants closely and have noted that easier-tempered infants vocalize more and cry less during play than do their less amiable peers. This early behavior has lifelong implications.

Young people whose style of interacting with the world is characterized by significant emotional ups and downs may be more likely to react negatively to teasing—even to verbalizations where the intent was playful inclusion. Children must come to learn that their emotionally fragile peers are likely to be hurt by teasing—or at least that their reaction to it will vary more than the reactions of others.

Children who tend to react with clear displays of emotion to teasing episodes must learn this about themselves and come to understand the consequences. Perry and colleagues discovered that children displaying overt signs of anxiety and distress suffer peer harassment at the highest rates (Hodges & Perry, 1996; Perry et al., 1988). A certain degree of comfort may be derived from the twin impulses of learning about one's self and coming to understand that all kinds of behavioral and personality styles are acceptable. Talking about this requires real sensitivity on the part of adults and may be difficult for those whose views reflect gender stereotyping (they may believe, for example, that boys do not cry or display other strong emotions).

Understanding that their peers differ in terms of the degree to which they are thin skinned about ridicule will help youngsters analyze an interaction that has gone badly. An adult attempting to explain these individual differences may employ the *frames*

metaphor to explain that a child's emotionality may place him or her outside of the teaser's frame, meaning that a misunderstanding was guaranteed. We could also explain this in terms of the teasee's frame, saying, for example, that "Sara's frame is small because she reacts strongly to what is said to her—and this puts you outside of *her* teasing frame."

Gender differences. Gender differences may place a young person outside the frame of a child he or she wishes to tease. Given the way children mature in our culture, it is difficult to imagine a frame wherein humor with sexual content would be well received until the teaser and teasee had established their relationship's ground rules. Starting at about third grade, the worlds inhabited by boys and girls can be quite foreign to one another—the frame for acceptance of teasing becomes very small indeed when the verbalization travels across the sexes.

Level of understanding. Individual differences in the ability to understand verbal and nonverbal communication affect the size of the teasing frame. The ability to comprehend language and even to understand the purposes of communication differs among youngsters—just as it does between adults. Some children may have difficulty catching on to the subtle cues—particularly those nonverbal cues that signal irony. That is, they may miss those communication cues that say—often via facial expressions or tone of voice—"I didn't mean it." What may appear to the sender as a lack of a sense of humor may be a problem with the receiver's "radar" for irony and sarcasm. Limited linguistic ability—or limited sensitivity to nonverbal communication—reduces the size of the frame within which teasing can reasonably, and painlessly, take place.

Sense of the humorous and absurd. Obviously a child's developing sense of the humorous and absurd will affect her or his perceptions of teasing. Individual differences in hard-wired cognitive style may affect the development of a sense of humor. An even stronger factor may be the child's familial experiences with absurdities and irony.

There are indications that what people find funny and their modes of expressing the humorous or absurd are culturally determined. For example, insult games are thought to have traveled with slaves from Africa (Kochman, 1981) and to have had a lasting affect on the verbal styles of certain groups of African American children. Thus the frame within which teasing will be well received is frequently reduced or enlarged by racial, cultural, and ethnic sensibilities, and care must be exercised until ground rules for relationships between individuals are firmly established. On the other hand, frames are sometimes expanded among those who are from the same ethnic, cultural, or linguistic group. Two members of an ethnic group can probably get away with kidding in ways that would be dysfunctional across groups (Kochman, 1981).

Factors Related to Topics of Teasing

Japanese anthropologist Mihashi (1987) examined the relationship between children's bullying and racial-ethnic bias. He concluded that a direct relationship existed between racial and cultural biases and the verbal content of children's teasing. For example, in some circles in Japan, Japanese citizens of Korean descent receive unequal treatment in housing and employment. Mihashi noted that a common playground insult was for one elementary student to call another "Korean."

Mihashi's work raises the important point that the symbolic and literal content of verbalizations plays a great role in determining whether a message will be received as a humorous anecdote or as aggressive bullying. He notes that verbal exchanges that children found offensive tended to associate the recipient with an undesirable object or animal. He points out that when a sixth-grade girl calls a sixth-grade boy a monkey, she is, in essence, dehumanizing him.

In our own work we have frequently seen this sort of dehumanizing through naming. Children have reported calling a victim "cow" and forcing her to eat grass publicly. We were involved in a situation where a young person had been called "Dumbo" by all the youngsters in his school from the time he had been in the third grade. The source of the nickname was all too apparent: he did indeed have wide-set ears. The youngster's life was made utterly miserable. The teasing rendered him less than human and opened him up to increasingly brutal bullying. He was beaten many times, and once older boys ran him off the road with their car when he was bicycling. Finally, the family moved out of town, fearing for the boy's physical and psychological safety (Hoover & Oliver, 1996).

For teens, whose identities are often wrapped up in their allure to members of the opposite sex (Pipher, 1994), this type of symbolic attack can be devastating. Considered in terms of the *frames* illustration, it can be said that teasing content that is dehumanizing, in which youngsters are compared to objectionable objects or animals, will decrease the size of the frame and increase the possibility that a hearer will react negatively.

To complicate matters, dehumanizing words can also be sent and received ironically, so that a message quite *opposite* from the

literal content of the words is intended and, the sender hopes, received. In some social organizations, such as fraternities, for example, newly elected members may be given an unusual name—generally one a bit on the insulting side. Far from being perceived as offensive, however, these ritual insults symbolize acceptance. Many social rituals along the lines of hazing take otherwise objectionable social forms, such as nudity or violence, and recast them as positive markers for entrance into clubs or groups (Hoover & Milner, 1998).

Irony requires a relatively sophisticated level of cognitive understanding. Thus the types of ritual insults that adults find amusing in television comedies might be adopted by children and used inappropriately. In addition, individual differences in cognitive-linguistic development between a sender and receiver may lead to serious misunderstandings. In terms of the *frames and scripts model,* it could be said that not being able to understand irony reduces the size of the frame. Of course, the closeness of the relationship between two individuals will, in part, determine whether they may trade ritual insults without causing hurt feelings.

Irony is often successful when the insulting words are obviously unrelated to the person in question. Thus, for example, calling a thin person "fats" is a clear signal that irony is intended. The exchange might still be taken as a real (rather than ritual) insult, however, if the person is sensitive about the issue. For example, if A calls B fat, and B, though not fat, is sensitive about his weight, B is likely to take offense. It might even happen that C calls D "fats" in order to praise D for being thin. It is possible that D is concerned about being *too* thin, will understand the irony, but take the reference to her *thinness* as an insult.

Situational factors may affect how an individual will react to verbalizations. An ironic or literal insult may have been received previously as inclusive praise. For example, E has nicknamed F "brain" in recognition of F's intelligence. Generally, F is pleased to be so recognized. Let's say, however, that another student has just severely criticized F for being a showoff in class—for wearing his intellect on his sleeve, so to speak. If this criticism weighs heavily on the individual, he might surprise his friend by reacting negatively to a comment that had previously been acceptable. These scenarios bring us once more to the central issue in this discussion: Young people must learn the skill of analyzing teasing and relationships, and they must develop the ability to ask questions to gauge peer reception of their teasing and other humor.

Factors Relevant to Relationships

Individuals who know and trust one another may trade ritual insults without harming egos or friendships. Although the rules positioning two individuals in the frame are complex, they are definitely worth addressing with youngsters. What is lost on many young people and some adults is the concept that the two parties might not share the same perspective regarding whether the relationship has progressed to the level where ritual insults can be successfully swapped.

In the "Hey fats" exchange, the initiator may have assumed that the friendship was so well established that the greeting would be perceived as a ritual insult rather than as bullying. It is certainly also possible that the comment was meant as a true insult and that the originator was using irony to disguise or excuse malicious intent (perhaps even from him- or herself).

Table 6.1

Content Considerations

You may wish to keep these issues in mind when working through a teasing episode:

- Reception of teasing content is related to levels of cognitive and language development.
- Many problems stem from situations where the sender is at a higher level of cognitive and linguistic development than the receiver. In other words, lower developmental levels narrow the teasing frame. Children can be told, for example, that "Sally probably did not understand that you were kidding."
- Irony narrows the frame in many cases because of the complexities of sending and receiving ironic messages. Irony is like sarcasm, except that whereas sarcasm is typically negative, irony is often meant to be satirically humorous, playful, or positive.
- Comparing a person to a detestable animal or object narrows the frame.
- Ritual insults, however, even odious animal comparisons, can be perceived as inclusive. They are a mark of belonging, and thus enlarge the frame.
- Insults (even ironic ones) narrow the frame when the content hits too close to home—when it touches on a subject about which the listener is sensitive.
- Momentary sensitivities, caused by upsets in a person's life, can also narrow the teasing frame.

Lists of questions and statements parents can use in approaching these issues are included in chapter 7.

The motivations of the speaker aside, the recipient of the teasing may not feel that the relationship has entered the stage where ritual insults can be accepted. In this case, it would help if participants understood the possibility that an intimacy has been assumed on only one side and that misunderstandings could result from these differing perceptions of the friendship. The teaser must learn to request information about whether the teasee will accept ribbing on the topic in question—or at all. The teasee must request, in clear and assertive tones, that the teasing stop, perhaps explaining that the two parties do not know one another well enough to allow the teasee to effectively evaluate the teaser's intentions. Scripts for such exchanges, which teachers and parents can teach students and practice with them, are provided in chapter 7.

Chapter Summary

- The idea behind *frames* is that connecting the complexities of teasing's unwritten rules to a physical object such as a picture or window frame will help children visualize (and understand) relationships between people.
- Three broad sets of factors affect the way a teasing exchange will be received: personal characteristics of the teasee, topics of the teasing, and the nature of the teaser-teasee relationship.
- Factors associated with the teasee that may affect reception of a teasing exchange include temperament, sense of humor, sensitivities, gender, and level of language development.

- Content touching on ethnicity, cultural affiliation, sexual proclivities, or physical characteristics is especially problematic and likely to be taken negatively.
- The degree to which two individuals have established ground rules for their relationship will affect whether an exchange is taken as good-natured ribbing or as a personal attack.

Chapter 7

Scripts

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES A DETAILED DISCUSSION OF *SCRIPTS*. This term refers to the self-talk about interpersonal problem solving that we hope to teach children to use. The term also refers to words and phrases parents and teachers can employ as they teach children to become better problem solvers. The idea is to transfer adult thought processes to children in such a way as to make these thought processes second nature.

Some scholars have argued that children's acquisition of social skills depends, in part, on their ability to talk about them (Guralnick et al., 1996). Our use of the term *scripts* refers to the relationship between thought and language and assumes that vocabulary development is not only helpful but necessary to the understanding of difficult conceptual material.

Young people are constantly using self-talk—what we are calling *scripts*—to converse with themselves about what is occurring socially in their lives. The fundamental idea in the method described here is that these scripts can be altered. For example, a youngster who consistently reacts with anger and frustration to what may look to outsiders like inclusive ritual insult may be talk-

ing to him- or herself about what is happening, but in a maladaptive way. This youngster might be telling herself that the teasing means that the teaser hates her or that it is preparatory to a physical attack. In the first case, the youngster might be feeling anger; in the second, fear might be the underlying force. This problem has been referred to as "stink thinking."

Scripts are also, as we have said, the exchanges that parents and teachers might remember and then use with youngsters in working through a teasing or bullying episode. The two concepts are really identical. Adults using scripts are learning new ways of talking to children about teasing. They are also teaching those children to internalize these scripts so they can talk to themselves about exchanges with others and develop healthier, more adaptive thinking about relationships.

The use of *scripts* requires that the caregiver consider the cognitive and linguistic level of the child. Perhaps even more important is that the adults in a child's life agree on a set vocabulary to use when talking about relationship problems. Use of these terms should, if possible, be consistent over time and with the adults who interact with the child. This chapter and Appendix E (see page 119) provide lists of terms related to bullying and teasing.

Research on social problem solving, as exemplified in the approach utilized here, suggests that children need continuing dialogue with adult caregivers about solutions. The method is especially effective when parents are used as problem-solving coaches, though teachers also make excellent coaches:

> Children in fact benefit when teachers use the social problem solving approach to resolve conflicts that occur daily both inside and outside the classroom. . . . Teachers are encouraged

> to talk children through . . . steps whenever possible, instead of simply suggesting an alternative solution or resorting to a more exclusively punishment-oriented strategy. (Gesten, Weissberg, Amish, & Smith, 1987, p. 37)

The following suggestions may be helpful to all potential coaches. Lists of suggested scripts are divided by age group, but scripts for older children build on scripts for younger children, so do not hesitate to refer to all of the lists for ideas.

First Years (Ages 1 to 4)

Early childhood is the period that begins with a child's first words. It includes the first stages of teasing and ends at a time when a child is able to speak sensibly about a cooperative activity. At this stage, parents and teachers should establish a useful and consistent vocabulary for teasing. They must say what they think at a level a child can understand.

Scripts for Children Ages 1 to 4 Who Are Being Teased

A child comes to you upset over something another child has said. Do not ignore the complaint or suggest that the situation is not important. Instead, try some of the following scripts.

- It's O.K. (all right) to be sad.
- It's O.K. (all right) to be upset or mad about what happened.
- Thank you for telling me about this. I like to know when you're upset.
- Let's talk about what happened.

- What did [other child] say?
- How did that make you feel? *(for children 3 and up)*
- What did you do?
- Did it help? Prompt: Did it make it better? Did you feel better? Did [other child] stop?

Encourage planning for next time:

- Be specific. Ask: What should you do next time?
- Emphasize personal safety first (where to go, who should be told).
- Role-play any verbal or behavioral aspects of the plan.

In responding, remember the following:

- The strategy of ignoring the teaser can be used at this age.
- Do not teach the child to strike back.
- Recruiting an adult to intervene may be both useful and necessary.
- It may be necessary to find a place to move to. In cases where, in the adult's judgment, real danger and threat exists, achieving distance and safety may be the primary component of the strategy.
- Rehearse an ending response: "I'm leaving."
- Praise the child for problem solving.

You may use these specific scripts when introducing vocabulary:

- [Name of child] was **making fun** of you.
- [Name of child] might have been **trying to make friends**.
- [Name of child] might not **know how to talk nicely** when trying to make friends.

Encourage the child to use the new vocabulary:

- Say: "Tell me what happened, using these words . . . (**making fun, trying to make friends, how to talk nicely**)."
- Coach until the child catches on. A good test is asking the child to use the words correctly in a sentence or a phrase related to the current situation.

Close the session carefully:

- Reaffirm that words can hurt.
- Empathize with the child's distress.
- Work with the child to rehearse the solution one last time.

Scripts for Children Ages 1 to 4 Who Tease Others

A child is observed teasing others or many reports of teasing by a child have come to the attention of parents or teachers. Try the following scripts when speaking to the teaser.

- What happened?

- I think that [name] is sad/mad because of something you said. *(Be specific about what was said that caused the distress.)*
- Why do you think that [name] is angry/sad about the teasing?
- Do you think that what you said made [name] sad or mad?
- If someone said _____ to me, I would be sad or even mad.

Use the following scripts to introduce vocabulary:

- **Sad** means feeling very low, like you want to **cry** all the time.
- When someone says mean things to me in a mad voice, I feel **sad.**
- Sometimes **sad** feels like **unhappy** and tired all mixed up together.
- Tell me some things that make you feel **sad** inside.
- **Mad** or **angry** means feeling like you want to hit or yell.
- Sometimes **mad** feels like you want to blow up.

Use the following scripts when encouraging the child to avoid such situations in the future:

- What will you do next time?
- Remember that [name] does not like to be teased about [topic]. Please do not tease [name] about [topic].

Early Elementary Years (Ages 5 to 8)

Children ages 5 to 8 are experiencing a truly transitional stage; they slowly become able to think seriously about others' feelings. Parental intervention may still be required in a majority of teasing cases, but understanding teasing and using self-control in teasing situations can be expected of youngsters as they reach age 8.

Ignoring teasers is not recommended at this age. An adult may react differently (intervene more vigorously) if the situation is dangerous, goes on repeatedly, or is continuous even after commands to stop. Ignoring teasing may teach unfortunate—and unintended—lessons. First, teasers may learn that their behavior has no consequences or may even infer that adults approve. This can increase the chances that teasing will recur. Ignoring may also produce an escalation of cruelty. In addition, victims might decide that the adult is not concerned about their well-being. The concept of fairness is very important to children at this age.

Teaching children to strike back or to take on an experienced teaser in verbal conflict is not recommended. Children at this, or any, age who are bullied often display interpersonal frailties. It is counterproductive to send them to do battle in an arena where they have already experienced difficulties. When you use the scripts below, keep in mind the following suggestions:

1. Recruiting an adult to intervene may be useful in the plan. At this age, children may start to resist the notion of involving adults. If it is a safety issue, direct the conversation to safety concerns.
2. As a group, chronic victims of bullying (and teasees often fit this description) tend to be more anxious and uncertain

than is typical for children. A three-pronged strategy is recommended.

- Teach and introduce the recommended vocabulary about human relationships and teasing.
- Be sure the child is physically and psychologically safe.
- Offer social-skills training in the areas of weakness.

3. Praise the child for problem solving.

Scripts for Children Ages 5 to 8 Who Are Being Teased

The same introductory vocabulary used with 1 to 4 year olds can be used with 5 to 8 year olds.

Use these scripts when introducing vocabulary:

- [Name of child] was **making fun** of you.
- [Name of child] might have been **trying to make friends.**
- [Name of child] might not **know how to talk nicely** when trying to make friends.
- **Insulting** means that the words were meant to **put you down** or meant to make you feel little inside. When someone **insults** you, it means that the words were meant to **hurt.** The person is **taunting** you.
- **Ribbing [kidding, joshing]** is a word for friendly teasing. Sometimes when friends say something mean, they don't mean it. They may smile when they say it.

Use these scripts to introduce the concept of frames:

- Think of a **picture frame** or a **window**. If two people are **in the frame**, they can tease each other. If they **aren't in the frame together**, the one out of the frame will consider the words to be **mean**.
- You were probably **out of the frame** because you _____. *(See chapter 6 [page 61] and Appendix D [page 117] for ideas.)* You didn't want [name] to **tease** you. When he/she did, it made you **sad** or **angry**.
- You may have been **sad** or **angry** because you didn't want to be **teased**.
- When people say **mean things**, things that **hurt**, we call that type of **teasing** an **insult** if they do it on purpose to hurt you. *(Rehearse vocabulary.)*
- Sometimes people say **mean things** as a **joke** or to **show that they like you**. Maybe they didn't mean to make you **sad** or **mad**.
- We use the word **ribbing** [or **joshing** or **kidding**] to mean **friendly teasing**. Can you think of a time when this has happened? *(It may be possible here to introduce the silly name game. This is a game in which the child and the adult take turns making up silly names for each other.)*
- Sometimes it's hard to tell if a person is being mean and **insulting** you or if he/she is just **ribbing** you.

Prepare for the future:

- Develop a plan.
- Gain the child's verbal commitment to follow the plan.

- Rehearse what the child will do in a teasing situation.
- Encourage the child and help the child memorize any necessary steps.
- Ask the child: "What will you say to [name] the next time he/she teases you?"
- Inform the child that it is O.K. to be sad or angry.
- Tell the child to talk to an adult whenever he or she needs to, but stress that you want the child to start thinking about solutions.

Scripts for Children Ages 5 to 8 Who Tease Others

The same introductory vocabulary used with 1 to 4 year olds can be used with 5 to 8 year olds.

Use these scripts to introduce vocabulary and discuss feelings:

- Why do you think [name] was angry or mad when you **teased** him/her?
- Teasing can be misunderstood sometimes. You don't always know how a person will take it when you say **joking** things to them.
- Sometimes teasing is mean. Then we use the word **insulting**. Mean teasing is **taunting** others or **putting them down**.
- Sometimes teasing is fun and everybody is happy to laugh together. This is called **ribbing**, or **kidding**, or **joshing**. **Ribbing** is a funny word, it is like having your ribs tickled. Having your ribs tickled **may be fun if you want this to happen.** If you do not want it, it is not fun.

Use these scripts to introduce and explain the notion of frames:

- Sometimes I think of a **picture frame** [**window frame**] when I try to understand why people did not think I was funny. If a person is in the picture **frame** with me, they will probably like my teasing. In this case, the teasing may be O.K., because my friends take it as **ribbing** or **joshing** [**kidding**].

- If I am **in the frame** and the other person is **out of the frame**, then teasing will be taken badly. It will be **taunting** to them.

- I think [name] was **mad** or **sad** when you teased him/her. He/she did not know that you were trying to be funny.

- He/she was not **in the frame** with you, I think. [Name] probably got **mad** or **sad** because _____. *(See chapter 6 [page 61] and Appendix D [page 117] for suggestions.)*

- Please do not tease [name] about _____. He/she is **out of the frame** when this happens and will become **mad** or **sad**. I do not want you to tease [name] about_____ because it is important to the [household/schoolroom] that children feel happy here.

- [In our room/at our play center/in our house] people should be left alone if that's what they want.

Use these scripts if teasing was sexual in nature or about body types:

- Teasing about body parts or sex, or talking loudly about these things, is hurtful. It is called **taunting** or **putting someone down**, and adults are required to talk to young people about it. (The term **sexual**

harassment may be introduced with more mature children.)

- When you tease about _____ [identify sexual topic or body part], the teasing is automatically **out of the frame**. [Name] is likely to feel very **bad** even if he/she does not tell you.
- I do not approve of teasing about sex or body parts with others. It will probably make them feel very **bad**.
- Would you like to talk more about [name topic] with me? Are you curious about what these words mean?

If appropriate, rehearse mild consequences for future episodes.

Intermediate Grades (Ages 9 to 11)

All of the scripts used with 5- to 8-year-olds can be introduced if teasing begins at this later age. If adults have been regularly talking about teasing with their children up to this point, those scripts may already have been learned. The scripts below assume familiarity with the terms introduced in those earlier lists. Now the idea is to continue and extend discussions of the *frames* concept.

Children at this age can be introduced to topics associated with "asking" when they think a student might be offended by what they say. Most children in this age group will not be able to generate extremely novel solutions to problems. At best, they will echo what adults have said. More often than not, adults will still need to introduce the strategies.

In this age group, most teasers and teasees, depending on their maturity level and experiences, will gain the ability to understand other people's points of view. Teasers may still find it troubling

that teasees were hurt, and teasees may intellectualize that some teasing is in fun, but may still overreact. As parents and teachers, we must be patient during this transitional period.

Scripts for Children Ages 9 to 11 Who Are Being Teased

Use these scripts to expand on the idea of frames (introduced in the scripts for ages 5 to 8):

Ask:

- Tell me what I mean by the idea of **frames**.

Explain:

- **Being in the frame** means that when people are close to each other in some way (usually socially), they can get away with teasing. They understand that teasing is O.K.

Ask:

- Give me an example of how you might know that teasing is O.K.

Explain:

- Some people are **not in the frame** together. One person might not understand **humor** or **being funny** the way another does. This puts him or her **out of the frame**.

Discuss:

- Let's think of an example of when teasing will hurt someone's feelings and put him or her **out of the frame**.

Explain:

- When teasing puts someone **out of the frame**, it becomes **taunting** or **harassment**. *(See other terms in Appendix E [page 119].)*

Discuss:

- Some things are not O.K. to tease about. For example, I do not like to be teased about my [(sex, appearance, weight, race, or religion)—honestly name your sensitivities.]
- It is all right not to want to be teased about certain things.
- I think that you are upset because you were not **in the frame** with [name of child] when he/she teased you.
- I don't mind being **joshed** [**kidded**, **ribbed**] in private, but I think that teasing becomes **taunting** or **pestering** when it is done in front of others.
- Do you think [name] meant to **kid** you or to **taunt** you? Do you think he/she meant to make you feel bad on purpose, or was he/she maybe only trying to be funny?

Use these scripts to reassure the child and prepare for future encounters:

- I think it's important that you tell [name] that you did not appreciate what he/she did. Can you think of some words to use? (For example, "[Name], it hurts my feelings when you tease me about my weight. I want you to stop it.") O.K. Let's practice that until you're comfortable saying it.

Scripts for Children Ages 9 to 11 Who Tease Others

Use the scripts suggested in the previous list ("Scripts for Use With Children Being Teased") to explain and extend the concept of frames. Change the context when necessary to accommodate the change in focus from teasee to teaser.

Use these scripts to introduce the concept of *empathy*:

- Sometimes it helps to imagine in your mind how other people are feeling. Let's try it now. Pretend your best friend tripped and fell painfully hard while others laughed. How do you think that person would feel?
- When you can imagine what another person is feeling inside, that is called **empathy**.
- Can you define **empathy**?
- In teasing situations, **empathy** is important because if you can imagine what the other person feels, you might make a different choice about teasing.

Use these scripts to model *empathy* and to help the teaser put *empathy* into practice:

- I think you are troubled for two reasons. First, I think you are unhappy that something you said made [name of child] unhappy. Is that right?
- Second, I think you are worried [angry] that you may be in trouble. You probably think this is unfair. Is that right?
- Just now I was able to imagine how you might feel as we talked together. That's because I think it's important to practice **empathy**.

- Is there something you would not tease me about? Yes! Why not? Yes, that would make me feel **sad** or **angry**. Good for you.
- How would you know or guess that what you were saying was making a person **sad**?
- How would you know or guess that what you said made a person **mad** or **angry**?
- I think that [name] felt upset—even though you were trying to be funny.
- Let's try to figure out why [name] felt out of your frame.

Teach and practice a strategy to use in teasing situations. We recommend some version of the following *STOP, THINK, and DECIDE* strategy:

Explain:

- I'd like you to try the STOP, THINK, and DECIDE strategy:

  1. **STOP** means that when you feel the desire to tease others, you wait until you have thought about how they might feel.
  2. **THINK** means that you spend a minute or so imagining how the other person will feel.
  3. **DECIDE** means that you will decide whether or not to tease based on how you imagine the other person might feel.

It may be important at this point to:

- rehearse consequences with a child who has found it difficult to refrain from taunting, threatening, or harassing others

- gain commitment to the plan, whatever has been decided
- decide how to determine whether or not the plan has worked
- rehearse consequences for verbal harassment

Occasionally a habit of being sharp-tongued will have been so well developed that youngsters will experience a great deal of difficulty learning to **STOP**, **THINK**, and **DECIDE**. Or they may decide that the rewards of teasing outweigh the consequences of hurting another's feelings. In such instances, a list of consequences can be generated and rehearsed. Students can even be taught to review consequences at the moment when they experience the urge to tease or harass.

Middle School, High School, and Beyond (Ages 12 and Up)

Most youngsters in this age group are ready to exhibit two important characteristics of maturity: practicing empathy and making behavioral choices. Most youth will be able to empathize with other people's feelings and are capable of making their own behavioral choices, or at least learning to do so. Teasers can learn to discontinue their behavior, and teasees can learn to tone down the emotionality of their responses.

Earlier *scripts* dealing with the *frames* concept can be extended for students in this age group. The level of the language can be increased to match the higher level of sophistication of this group's thought processes. Children at this age are even readier to experience empathy than were 9- to 11-year-olds. However, if the vocabulary groundwork has not been established earlier, that work may have to be done now. Teens are much more able than

preteens to generate their own strategies and to suggest useful ways to monitor progress on interpersonal goals they might set. Remember, though, that it is never safe to assume that teens are aware of cultural norms about harassment and threats.

Even when they can verbalize socially appropriate responses, teens cannot always translate language into behavior. For example, in the heat and excitement of a humorous exchange, they might forget to ask (or attend to body language in order to determine) whether a peer is troubled by teasing about a certain topic. In such a case, it is important to rehearse the questioning strategy and to be persistent in providing training and feedback as a natural part of consequences. It is often helpful to adopt a stance that might best be described as "patient persistence."

Scripts for Youth Ages 12 and Up Who Tease or Are Teased

Use this progression of scripts to talk about issues of sexuality:

- I notice that it seems more complicated when boys tease girls than when boys tease boys or girls tease girls. It can also be troubling when girls tease boys.
- If the teasing is about sex or body parts, it can be thought of as **sexual harassment**.
- **Sexual harassment** can mean that an uncomfortable environment is created by the way people talk about sex or body parts. People can be made to feel so uncomfortable that they really don't have **equal access** to schools or workplaces or programs. In other words, they cannot make effective use of school—they do not get as much out of it as they could.

- If someone teased me continually about the way I looked, or talked about **intimate** [**sexual**, **sexy**] things in front of me at school or at work, I would be so uncomfortable that I might not want to go there or to be around those people anymore.
- This kind of problem is called **sexual harassment**. It is **illegal** [**against the law**] and you can be held **accountable** [**get in trouble**, **suffer unhappy consequences**] for it. You might get into trouble and have to leave a place where you would like to be, such as school or the gym at school.
- Also, **sexual harassment** is so uncomfortable for people that it makes them feel bad.
- Calling others of the same sex names that have to do with sexuality is also **sexual harassment**. For example, I don't like it when one boy calls another a "faggot" or talks about someone as "so gay." This is an example of **sexual harassment**.

Use these scripts to discuss irony and sarcasm:

Explain:

- Sometimes people can be **out of the teasing frame** because they don't understand **irony** or **sarcasm**.
- **Irony** is the use of words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning.
- **Sarcasm** is cutting humor that usually **ridicules**, or makes fun of, someone or something, sometimes by saying the opposite of what is true.
- **Irony** and **sarcasm** can be fun if everyone involved is **in the same frame**.

Ask:

- Let's think of some examples of **irony**.

Explain:

- **Irony** can be very funny, but some individuals don't understand it very well.
- When one person means something funny using **irony**, the other person might misunderstand it and take the words literally. If I think you're smart but call you a fool, I am being **ironic**. But what if you think I'm serious? My **irony** could backfire.
- If you didn't understand **irony** or missed the point, how would you feel? Let's use our **empathy** skills.
- **Sarcasm** can involve irony—the words can mean the opposite of what is really said—but we usually mean to be **mocking** or unkind when we use **sarcasm**.
- **Sarcasm** is usually taken as hurtful.

Use these scripts to discuss the concept of verbal playfulness:

- In our culture, as in many cultures, people like to **play with words**. You can think of this as **verbal playfulness**.
- Trading **ritual insults** or using **sarcasm** or **irony** with friends can generally be seen as **verbal playfulness**.
- **Puns**—plays on words, sometimes on words that sound alike, sometimes on different meanings of the same word—are examples of **verbal playfulness**.
- **Verbal playfulness** is considered fun sometimes by people your age. If everyone understands that the

words are meant in fun, then verbal playfulness can be very enjoyable. **Joshing, joking, ribbing, jiving** *(offer any other current terms you know [see Appendix E on page 119])* are words used to describe this.

Ask:

- Can you think of situations where playfulness like this has produced misunderstandings?
- What tends to happen?
- Tell me what has happened to you in this situation. How can these troublesome situations be avoided?

Students over age 11 can be asked to generate a solution. The STOP, THINK, and DECIDE model will work very well with teens, particularly if they have helped develop the plan. Rehearsing consequences may prove effective with this group also.

Finally, another effective strategy is to teach about values regarding the worth of other people and how they are to be treated. To do this, adults in the youngster's world must have developed a vision statement (see Table 7.1) about what they consider appropriate. This statement must be clear and must imply that certain behaviors are acceptable and that others are not. The teen is then challenged to compare his or her behavior with the publicly articulated standard and to decide whether it is appropriate.

(continued)

Table 7.1

Sample Vision Statements

- In our family we treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Judge people by what's inside them, not by how they look.
- We ask before we flirt or joke. We accept it when someone says no to us.
- At [name of school] we respect the value of all people. We do not ridicule one another.

Chapter Summary

- We use the term *scripts* to refer to the self-talk about interpersonal problem solving that we teach children to use. It also refers to the words and phrases parents and teachers use as they teach children to become better problem solvers.
- With younger children (ages 1 to 4), adults should concentrate on introducing vocabulary that will help youngsters distinguish between taunting and harassment and the more playful ribbing or joshing.
- It is important that the adults in the child's life be consistent with the terms they have chosen to use to describe teasing situations.

- Teasing about sexual topics and body parts at any age is inappropriate. The problem of sexual harassment, along with a notion of its unfairness and illegality, can be introduced to those as young as 8 and expanded on with those age 11 or older.
- Both teasers and teasees are taught the *frames* notion through adult *scripts*. Consistent positive terms *(joshing, kidding, ribbing)* are equated with efforts to tease inclusively; contrasting terms *(taunting, harassing, pestering, threatening)* are used consistently to describe teasing meant to harm or perceived as harmful.
- Older children are taught to generate their own problem-solving strategies. Adults propose strategies for younger children.

Chapter 8

Community-Wide Violence Prevention

VERBAL BEHAVIOR SUCH AS TEASING PLAYS A LARGE ROLE in the overall climate or ambiance of a school or home. If students are allowed to harass one another without consequences or training-based interventions, all students in the school are much more likely to be at risk for suffering harm from more dangerous forms of violence. While less than 1% of all violent acts take place in school, rates of violence in schools are much higher than Americans would like. During the 1997–1998 school year, more than 190,000 violent acts took place in American schools. It is important to note that schools that reported the most minor behavioral incidents were the most likely to also report major, violent episodes (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Our discussions with young people and everything we have read lead us to the following conclusion: Tackling the problem of low-level violence is an essential component of overall violence prevention.

Though bullies are more likely to commit violent acts in the future, probably because of high levels of anger and a mindset toward violent problem solving (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999), victims' rage often comes to the public's attention, too. No one is quite sure of the mechanism, but longstanding abuse can lead to rage as well as to a more well-established pattern of internalized self-hatred, anxiety, and depression (National School Safety Center, 2000). Many of the high-profile acts of school violence—such as the shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Padacuh, Kentucky; and Littleton, Colorado—were attributed, at least in part, to the rage experienced by students who saw themselves as chronic victims of teasing and peer abuse.

On March 25, 1994, Brian Head, a Georgia teen, committed suicide by shooting himself in front of his classmates. He had reportedly suffered taunting and teasing for many years. His mother testified that "Brian had to deal with teasing, torment, and verbal abuse that seemed unrelenting" (Head, 1996, p. 7). Perhaps the toxic mix of fear, sadness, and rage is best expressed in words penned by Brian himself and found in his room after his death:

> For all my life I have lived with the words of America's sadistic children. Children who have become so distorted by the images of insult to all those who are different that they don't even have the capability to understand that what they do is wrong. (Head, p. 8)

A very brave young man wrote a letter to his university newspaper in the days following the tragic 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. In thinking back over his days in junior high, he commented that he understood the rage

of students who had been brutalized by their peers, especially in situations where adults left them to fend for themselves. He recalled fantasizing about violence because of the constant taunting he experienced, and he claimed he "vividly remembered many walks to school each morning trying to concoct a plan to either kill myself or those . . . who never let me be" (Fransen, 1999). This is not to excuse the actions of the two students responsible for the Littleton, Colorado, tragedy, but it is sobering to consider the effects of ridicule on vulnerable youth. For our own safety and that of our children, we must consider *all* possible causes of violence in our society.

Improving the interpersonal climate in our schools should be an essential component of community-wide anti-violence campaigns. The lessons students learn in school about how to peacefully resolve conflicts will be an essential component of efforts to reduce overall levels of violence in the culture. We hope that the tool you now hold open in your hands, along with those listed in the resource section, will play a part in helping young people gain the skills to replace violent impulses with more productive rational thought. Of course, a plan for dealing with teasing is but one small part of the task of countering violence. As Garbarino pointed out in his book *Lost Boys* (1999), society-wide violence against children in the form of poverty, racism, abuse, and neglect must be addressed if we are to seriously tackle the problem of violence in America. For young people, learning how to handle teasing situations is an essential social skill. The teaching of this skill is a potential antidote to the widespread bullying problems in our schools, as well as a step towards ending the violence that plagues our communities.

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Appendix A

Initial Adult Caregiver Attitude Checklist

In the frames and scripts model, *it is important that adults accept certain "ground rules" in their attitudes toward children and teasing. Before you discuss teasing vocabulary,* frames, *and* scripts *with a child, read through the following list. If you do not accept at least eight of the ground rules in the list, the model may not work in your setting. If you do accept these principles, then the checklist will serve as a valuable reminder as you work with young people.*

_____ 1. **No right to tease.** I believe that no fundamental right to tease others exists, and I have gently explained this to the children in my care.

_____ 2. **Stopping it.** If children are unable to resolve disputes based on taunting or verbal harassment, I will gently stop the teasing, explaining the idea in item 1 above.

_____ 3. **Unconditional regard for children.** I maintain affection for young people—even in the face of behavior of which I may not approve. I know that it helps to maintain a sense of humor.

_____ 4. **Sensitivity to developmental level.** As I prepare to intervene, I think about the child's ability to understand language that relates to teasing and his or her ability to attempt such cognitively demanding attitudes as empathy. I am willing to use visually based ideas such as *frames.*

_____ 5. **Active listening.** I know that caregivers must be skilled listeners. I am aware of and can employ such skills as maintaining periods of silence, paraphrasing, and communicating interest through body language. When a child believes he or she has been bullied, I am willing to assume initially that the child's hurt is real and reasonable.

_____ 6. **Considering the importance of language.** I understand the power of language to hurt. I acknowledge that many youngsters are at a developmental level where they see language in nearly magical terms as very potent.

_____ 7. **Observing children's behavior.** I know that I must be skilled at observing elements of the child's body language and behavior so that I can discern whether an exchange is ribbing or kidding or a more serious taunting or bullying episode.

_____ 8. **Encouraging a positive verbal style.** I am willing to model a style of speech low in sarcasm and irony—particularly around younger children. I understand the importance of demonstrating verbal problem solving. This often means talking out loud about "steps" of thinking through a difficulty so children can hear them.

_____ 9. **Allowing children to problem-solve.** I allow and encourage the child to exercise problem-solving skills in the arena of social behavior.

_____ 10. **Consequences.** I am willing to gently but consistently impose consequences for inappropriate behavior. Consequences can be as gentle as a brief problem-solving session, practice empathizing with a victim, or a short timeout.

_____ 11. **Approach to humor.** I consider humor to be a virtue as long as it does not consistently and purposefully frustrate or hurt another person.

If you check at least 8 items on this list, you are ready to use the frames and scripts model *effectively. Some of the items assume knowledge that can be acquired in this book.*

Appendix B

Checklist for Examining the Potential Roles of Teasing

Consider the following possibilities when evaluating an episode of teasing and check all those that apply. This form will help you determine the reason behind the teasing.

1. **The teasing was an attempt to reduce social distance.**
   - _____ The teaser possesses no other skills for making friends.
   - _____ The tone of voice of the teaser was open/jocular.
   - _____ The teaser was attempting to defuse an angry situation.
   - _____ No evidence existed, from body language or the situation, of an effort to harm the teasee.
   - _____ The teaser has expressed affection through humor or irony in the past.
2. **The teasing was an example of intellectual sparring or verbal playfulness.**
   - _____ The teasing seemed to be an exchange. That is, both parties (or all parties) were engaged in the repartee.
   - _____ The body language of one or both (or all) parties appeared to be positive.
   - _____ Laughter accompanied the exchange.

3. **The teasing was an attempt to bully another child.**
   - _____ The body language indicated hostility (fists bunched, teaser was leaning forward).
   - _____ The tone of voice of the teaser suggested hostile intent.
   - _____ The teaser appeared aware that the teasee did not like the topic.
   - _____ The teasing seemed like a way to show off in front of others.
   - _____ The topic of the exchange compares the teasee to an undesirable object or animal.
   - _____ The teaser continued even when the teasee was obviously distressed.

4. **The teasing appeared to be an attempt to increase social distance.**
   - _____ The teaser appeared to want to increase social distance (possible body language: pushing movements with hands, leaning back and away, avoiding or moving away from people).
   - _____ The teaser left soon after the exchange.
   - _____ The teaser is a child who seems to be uncomfortable in social situations.

5. **The teasing was meant to gauge the emotional atmosphere.**
   - _____ The teaser did not know the teasee well.
   - _____ The teaser and teasee had not seen each other for some time.
   - _____ The teaser and teasee's relationship had been under stress in some way.

Appendix C

Problem-Solving Worksheet for Youth Age 11 and Older

Name of student _____

Name of adult _____

Date _____

1. **Statement of the problem.** Be sure to use *frames* terminology to analyze "what went wrong" (young person makes statement about teasing episode, adult monitors):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. **Proposed solution**. (Young person generates actions and scripts for solution, adult monitors):

   - **ACTIONS**

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

   - **SCRIPTS**

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. **Be specific about how to monitor progress**. (Student and adult both provide input):

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. **Review progress** on _____ (date).

Appendix D

Frames Worksheet

Work with the child to explain and give examples of the following common frame-based reasons why well-meant teasing sometimes goes awry. Write the examples in the blanks. Then help the child identify which reasons match the experience you are now discussing and decide what could be done differently in future situations. This worksheet can be used with both teasers and teasees, though the focus of the exercise will change from "why the other person *was upset" to "why* you *were upset." Always ask the child: Are you in or out of the frame?*

Possible reasons for a person's negative reaction to a teasing incident:

- Doesn't like teasing_____
  _____
  _____

- Has lots of emotional ups and downs (person regularly shows great range of emotion) _____
  _____
  _____

- Differences in the ways boys and girls see things _____
  _____
  _____

- Doesn't understand teasing or sarcastic humor _____
  _____
  _____

- Topic too uncomfortable_____
  _____
  _____

- Compared person to an object or animal _____
  _____
  _____

- Topic is not appropriate for sharing in front of others ____
  _____
  _____

- Had a bad day/week _____
  _____
  _____

- Other reasons teasing may have been poorly taken_____
  _____
  _____

Note: If the strategies you and the child decide upon for future teasing situations are not effective, it might be necessary to rethink the reasons behind the teasing episode.

Appendix E

Scripts Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to help adults select explanatory language to use when talking with young people about teasing, bullying, or harassment.

Age of child _____

Description of teasing-related problem:

_____

_____

_____

_____

1. **Teach vocabulary first.** *Teasing* is a neutral term referring to insulting-like words that may be accompanied by subtle cues rendering the words less hurtful. It is important to distinguish between friendly, inclusive verbal playfulness and nasty verbalizations.

2. **Decide what term(s) you will use for positive types of teasing:**

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions:

- *For younger children*—kidding, fooling around, joking, joshing, ribbing
- *For older children*—wordplay, verbal playfulness, repartee, or any of the above

3. **Decide what term(s) you will use for teasing when it becomes angry, aggressive, or bullying in tone:**

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions:

- *For younger children*—bothering, pestering, hurting with words, putting down, mean words, bullying with words
- *For older children*—tormenting, taunting, pestering, harassing, disturbing, hassling, putting down (put-downs), verbal harassment

4. **Provide a simple statement at the child's developmental level that explains your position with regard to taunting and verbal harassment and why they are not O.K.:**

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F

Additional Resources

Books for Children

Adams, L. (1991). *Dealing with teasing.* New York: Rosen.

Baynton, M. (1988). *Jane and the dragon.* Martinez, CA: Discovery.

Berry, J. (1988). *A children's book about teasing: Help me be good.* Danbury, CT: Grolier.

Romain, T. (1997). *Bullies are a pain in the brain.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Programs and Curriculum Guides

Beane, A. (1999). *The bully free classroom.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Byrne, B. (1994). *Bullying: A community approach.* Dublin, Ireland: The Columbia Press.

Cohn-Posey, K. (1995). *How to handle bullies, teasers, and other meanies.* Highland City, FL: Rainbow.

Elliott, M. (1997). *Bullying: A practical guide to coping for schools.* London: Pittman. (This is a description of the Kidscape program used in the London schools.)

Fried, S., & Fried, P. (1996). *Bullies and victims.* New York: Evans.

Garrity, C., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N., & Short-Camilli, C. (1995). *Bully proofing your school: A comprehensive approach for elementary schools.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Hoover, J. H., & Oliver, R. O. (1996). *The bullying prevention handbook: A guide for principals, teachers, and counselors.* Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Johnson Institute (1996). *Respect and protect: Violence prevention and intervention program.* Minneapolis, MN: QVS.

Johnston, M. (1998). *Dealing with bullying.* New York: Rosen.

Luvmour, S., & Luvmour, J. (Undated). *Everyone wins: Cooperative games and activities.* Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Ross, D. M. (1996). *Childhood bullying and teasing: What school personnel, other professionals, and parents can do.* Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Sonnes-Feinberg, L. (1996). *Teasing: Innocent fun or sadistic malice?* Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press.

Articles and Books

Carlsson-Paige, N., & Levin, D. E. (1990). *Who's calling the shots? How to respond effectively to children's fascination with war play and war toys and violent TV.* Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society.

Cruickshank, D. (Ed.). (1990). *Research that informs teachers and educators.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Curwin, R. L., & Mendler, A. N. (1988). *Discipline with dignity.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Freiberg, J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways: Realizing a positive school climate. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 22–25.

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Larson, S., & Hoover, J. H. (2000). Risk in our midst: Empowering teenagers to love the unlovable. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing.

Mayer, G., & Mayer, M. (1995). *Just a little different.* New York: Golden.

Mendler, A. (1997). *Power struggles: Successful techniques for educators.* Rochester, NY: Discipline Associates.

Olsen, G., & Hoover, J. H. (1997). Conflict resolution in schools: A review. *North Dakota Journal of Human Services, 1*(2), 28–37.

General Information Web Sites

National Association of Elementary School Principals.
http://www.naesp.org

National Association of School Psychologists.
http://www.naspweb.org

National Association of Secondary School Principals.
http://www.nassp.org

National Center for Education Statistics.
http://nces.ed.gov

National Education Association. Safe Schools Now.
http://www.nea.org/issues/safescho

National School Safety Center.
http://www.nssc1.org

Parent Teacher Association. Community Violence Prevention.
http://www.pta.org/events/violprev

Talking With Kids About Tough Issues.
http://www.talkingwithkids.org

Safe & Drug Free Schools Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS

Web Sites With Information About Teasing

You may find these web sites to be informative and useful. Several of them are directed toward youth. Most contain links to other sites, and some include specific suggestions about how children can react to teasing episodes.

- About.Com lists several useful links and sites. An overall search location is http://earlychildhood.about.com/education/earlychildhood/blop.htm?iam=dp&rf=dp
- A site dedicated to the issue of shyness that contains an informative essay about teasing:
  http://members.aol.com/cybernettr/shysite/assert.html
- Professor Joan Fleitas, R.N., Ed.D., of Fairfield University, maintains an extensive teasing site with many useful links. Tips for youngsters are located at
  http://funrsc.fairfield.edu/~jfleitas/teasetips.html

  Further links are located at
  http://funrsc.fairfield.edu/~jfleitas/teasing3.html
- A site maintained by clinical social worker Judy S. Freedman acknowledges the potential seriousness of teasing as an issue with young people. Many specific suggestions are offered at
  http://www.prairie.district96.k12.il.us/Easing%20the%20Teasing/homepage.html

- Gail Wilson Lew's essay about teasing is part of a site maintained by Parentpals.com. "Stuttering and Teasing" includes three believable scenarios for parents and therapists, as well as Lew's suggestions: http://www.parentpals.com/5.0newsletter/5.5speechnews/5.5.1stuttease.html

Videos and Video Guides

Brown, T. (Undated). *The broken toy* [video]. Zanesville, OH: A Kids Hope and Summerhill Productions.

Brown, T. (1997). *But names will never hurt me* [video]. Zanesville, OH: Summerhill Productions.

Coastal Training Technologies. (1999). *School violence: Draw the line* [video]. Study guide by J. Hoover & B. Dornheim. Virginia Beach, VA: Coastal Training Technologies.

Hoover, J. (1997). *Set straight on bullies* [video study guide]. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

National School Safety Center. (1997). *Set straight on bullies* [video]. Westlake Village, CA: NSSC.

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About *Teasing and Harassment* and the National Educational Service

The mission of the National Educational Service is to provide tested and proven resources that help those who work with youth create safe and caring schools, agencies, and communities where all children succeed. *Teasing and Harassment: the Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents* is just one of many resources and staff development opportunities NES provides that focus on building a community circle of caring. If you have any questions, comments, articles, manuscripts, or youth art you would like us to consider for publication, please contact us at the address below. Or visit our website at:

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Teasing and Harassment

The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents

"Hoover and Olsen provide readers with 'real verbal solutions' for parents and teachers, who need to hear that verbal aggression does hurt kids and that kids should have the right to stop it."

— Dorothy L. Espelage, Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Teasing and Harassment: The Frames and Scripts Approach for Teachers and Parents will help you learn how to counter and prevent low-level aggression in school and at home. Based on social learning theory, the frames and scripts approach provides easy-to-learn language for working with children and youth to

- Unlearn the behavior that leads to teasing and harassment
- Change internal scripts during a situation that requires problem solving
- Learn a positive problem-solving sequence

Designed for use in grades K-12, this resource also includes relevant information on child development and a special section on teasing, taunting, and community-wide violence prevention.

John H. Hoover, Ph.D., is a professor of education and the director of the Bureau of Educational Services and Applied Research at the University of North Dakota.

Glenn W. Olsen, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Early Childhood Education Division of the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota.

"*Teasing and Harassment* provides concrete skills one can learn as an adult and teach to children. This approach includes a logical sequence of skill development through scripts and an explanation of the developmental levels of children."

— Chuck Sautter, Coordinator, Maine Project Against Bullying, and Guidance Counselor, West Bath School, K-6, Bath, ME

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